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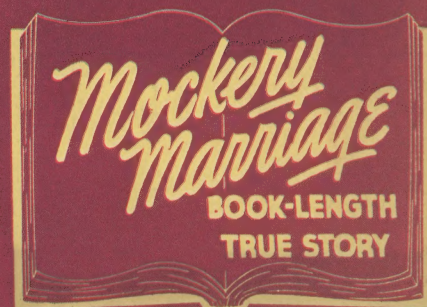
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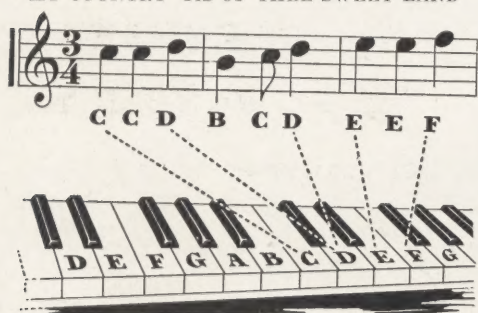
THEY
EXPECTED
THE WORST
OF ME



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Secrets

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NEXT MONTH

UNHOLY HONEYMOON—She was not of his world, nor did they have even love in common. Why then should she have given up the man she loved to marry him? Read this powerful story in

April SECRETS. . . . On Sale Everywhere February 20

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*Remember—
we're
divorced!*



I'LL NEVER forget that day! It was December and pouring rain, and anyone knows what rains are in December. But it wasn't the cold that made me thrust my ungloved fingers so deep in my muff. It was the place where my wedding ring no longer was.

"Good evenin', Mis' Stafford." The doorman, swinging the apartment door hospitably wide, grinned. "We sure missed you. Did you have a nice vacation?" As if a trip to Reno could ever be a vacation!

I stood there, tears stinging my eyes, in the warm, sweet-smelling, steam-heated lobby, and wondered—as hundreds of other unhappy women must have wondered

in their time—how when your whole life stopped, things like elevators and doormen and furnishings could still go on unchanged.

Then I smiled and I tried to keep my mouth from going too bitter. "A lovely vacation, Pete."

Anyhow, I was thinking, as I put down the heavy grip that seemed to weigh as much as I did, they couldn't say, "Connie's lost her nerve," any more. They'd say, "We give her credit. She did the only thing a self-respecting girl could do." They'd say, "What did she ever marry a guy like Don for anyhow? Shiftless, philandering, two-timing. So what if he was handsome? All right! So

he had charm. That doesn't mean a man can get away with murder. Oh, she'll get over it. They always get over it in time. When you're young enough, nothing lasts forever."

Young enough! A knife of pain tore suddenly through my heart.

"Remember you're only as young as your dreams, Connie," I told myself, and I felt suddenly old. I hoped Pete didn't notice the quick, hard intake of my breath, but apparently he did, for his voice and his dark face went gentle as he said quickly, "Looks like somebody else been missin' you 'round dese parts, Mis' Stafford. Dere's a big package done come from the florist. I took de liberty of leavin' it in yo' room. I was afraid I might not be on duty when yo' got back."

A package? That would be Blane, I reflected as the elevator rose and I found myself at my door. I wanted

Then I was sobbing my heart out beside Don's roses, trying not to remember his scrawled words: "It's been six weeks of hell. Please, Connie—"



to laugh, or maybe it was hysterics. Why is it always the wrong man who does the right thing, or the right man who does the wrong thing? I pulled off my hat and gloves, shed my coat. I could just see Blane leaving his desk at the *Sentinel* to telephone a shop about flowers, and doing it in a whisper so he wouldn't be ribbed by the boys; Blane, the good friend, the shoulder to weep on, the heart of gold. Only it would have been far kinder if he'd been there to meet the train. It wasn't flowers that could help an unwilling divorcee on her first night back from Reno. It was someone who would whisk her bodily out of every memory that would rush out to haunt her.

And then, five minutes later, I was sobbing my heart out on the bed beside an open florist's box. I was trying not to smell the talisman roses or see the familiar, crazy scrawl that was as unusual and erratic as Don himself on the white florist's card whose corners cut into my bruised palm, trying not to remember his abject words:

CONNIE DARLING:

It's been six weeks of hell. I was a dog ever to have looked at another woman. But I am a dog, and you know it, and you've always been kind to animals. Please, Connie, I'm all loose ends.

Have dinner with me tonight if only to say you don't hate me. I'll fly to you on wings or crawl on my belly, whichever you prefer.

Connie, remember Jock's? I'll be waiting there—even if it's till dawn. Please, Connie, don't let down your wretched, no-good Don.

And only two months before, Don had been named correspondent in a sensational divorce suit. Of course, he had sworn that he had only squired Nella Ross about a bit because she was high up in radio and he thought she might have influence. But there was Nella, golden

An unusual confession of a wife who found that divorce was not the end of marriage ties with her weakling husband but the beginning of his new and strange hold on her

and rich and luxurious. And there was I, plain and twenty-six and a girl who was made for standing on her own feet. And besides, there were all the times before.

As soon as I could pull myself together, I picked up the phone book and looked up the *New York Sentinel*. I had to get to Blane—I had to—before I went crawling off to Jock's and undid all I'd accomplished in Reno.

"Blane, Blane!" I remember gasping into the mouthpiece. "It's Connie talking. I just got in—and, Blane, would you take me to dinner tonight? I'll never ask you another favor if you will, Blane. Please!"

"Connie darling! Gee, it's good to hear your voice. I'd have been at the train, but a big assignment came through tonight. Connie, it's the biggest. You know I'm a reporter, honey. I gotta stick around—"

"Blane, maybe this is a bigger one. Maybe—"

Well, maybe it was. One thing sure, there wasn't any pretense between Blane and me. Six years before, I'd got my first job in his sister's interior (Continued on page 60)

No Trust In

FUNNY, isn't it, the difference there is between one woman and another? Take two girls from one family, born of the same mother, reared in the same environment, and in one the fires of passion smolder hotly, needing only a breath to send them into leaping flames, while in the other they lie banked and dormant, scarcely if ever breaking into open fire. Cold women I've heard them called.

Maybe that's putting it a bit crudely, but I'm a blunt man. I've been around a bit in my twenty-seven years, following construction jobs up and down, over and across these United States. The last four years I've been foreman of as tough a gang as ever poured cement, a rough-and-ready crew of men—big, strong, alive—and we learned to spot a willing woman the moment we laid eyes on her. They were the kind we always went for, and the kind we said we'd never marry. Too many headaches, I guess, for most women of that sort don't want a man—they want men. But I married one, just the same.

I recognized the type when Lila stepped from behind the counter of the little restaurant to take my order: deep-bosomed, with hair so blue-black it fairly glinted in the patch of sunlight that fell through the plate glass window onto the floor; heavy-lidded black eyes that traveled leisurely over me while her red lips, full and pouting, broke into a slow smile. I knew she was appraising my six feet of tanned body, from the heavy construction boots I wore to the brown hair that would curl on one side no matter how hard I brushed it. My pulse quickened, for I could see Lila knew her stuff all right, and I was no weak, flickering flame myself.

If that sounds like bragging, I can only say I don't want it to. It was just that Lila and I fitted like new hats on Easter. She was a woman who could bring to the man she loved happiness beyond belief or despair beyond comprehension. And we both knew it in that first moment.

She stood there, smiling slightly, and I ordered my lunch in a half-strangled voice. We had only an hour off at noon, and I had to hurry back to the job. But I had to see this girl again, just as surely as I had to breathe.

"Look," I said, as she turned away, "I'm Jack Bates, construction foreman on the new bridge going up just outside town. We only blew in yesterday, but I've got to see you again. What time do you get off work? Where can I meet you?"

Her smile widened as she left the table. I watched the slow, lithe swelling of her hips as she walked across the room,

and beads of perspiration broke out on my forehead. Suppose she wouldn't date me! Suppose she was married!

When she returned with the check, her lips were still smiling, through her eyes avoided mine. But when I noticed the tiny slip of paper attached to the check my heart jumped. "Lila Geoffrey," it said. "1222 East Avenue. Be there at eight."

She was gone by the time I finished reading the message. I saw her behind the counter, rinsing glasses, not looking my way. But that didn't matter; I could wait till tonight for another glance from those sultry eyes. Jerking my hat low to shade my face from the sun, I paid my bill and chased back to the job.

I goaded the men that afternoon. We were excavating for one of the big piers, preliminary work before building forms and laying iron. You can't push a crew like I had, but I certainly tried. I must have resembled the fellow who drove like the devil to get where he was going before he ran out of gas. It seemed the more work



Her

He lived in a hell of his own making because he couldn't trust the woman he worshipped

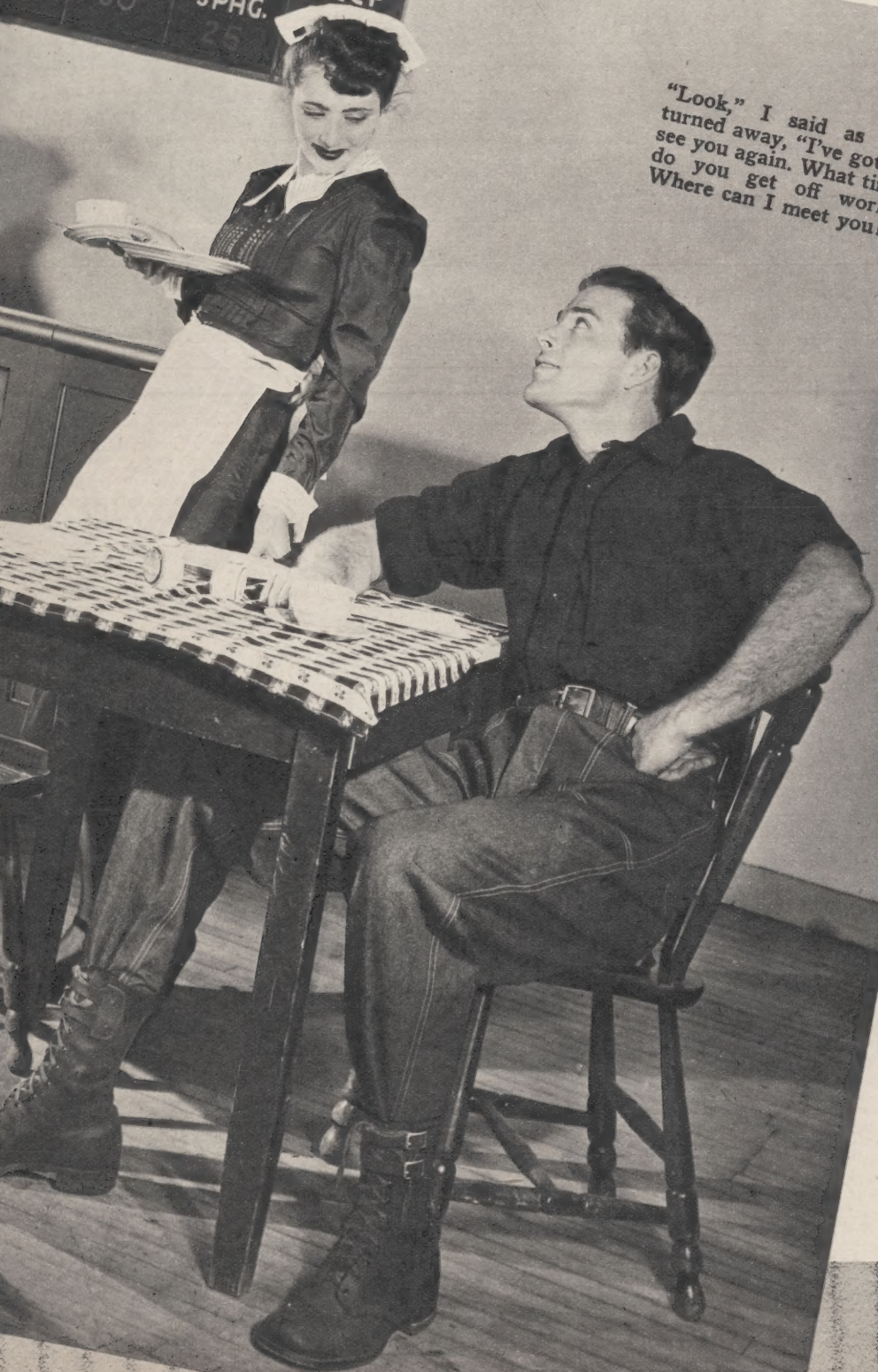
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MEAT BALLS SPAG. 25
ROAST BEEF

"Look," I said as she turned away, "I've got to see you again. What time do you get off work? Where can I meet you?"

I got done, the sooner quitting time would roll around. And I guess it was all for the best, at that. Certainly we accomplished more in that afternoon than we did for some time. After that, all I could think of was Lila.

1222 East Avenue was an apartment house. I pushed the bell under Lila's name and she invited me right up. It wasn't a swell place, but it was neat and clean, and Lila didn't bother to apologize. Working as a waitress keeps you in bacon and beans, but not much else.

We went out somewhere—to a movie, I think—but I wasn't paying attention to anything but Lila. The way she moved, those sleepy, languorous eyes, and her slow, seductive smile made me wild with wanting her, and though I was careful never to be too insistent on a first date, before the evening was over, I knew she felt the same way about me. When I took her in my arms, her lips responded avidly to my caress. We were made for each other, and we admitted that fact without any pretense or prudishness. I don't know if I was in love when I married Lila three weeks later, but I suppose I must have been. She was like a wild fever racing through my veins, a fever that no one but Lila could calm. I needn't have married her; but thought of her ever again being held close in the arms of another man nearly drove me out of (Continued on page 41)



MINE

Was the Sin

NOT EVEN my best friends asked me the questions I saw in their eyes. No one ever said, "Why did you stay with Jeff, Martha? After what happened, how could you stay? Haven't you any pride?"

It was a twelve-year-old neighbor boy who put their speculations into words, and he didn't mean for us to hear. We were walking home one evening, Jeff and I, when the boy's voice came through a hedge, "Here comes Jeff Winter now. Did you know that he killed—" The rest was the garbled account a twelve-year-old had gleaned from adult gossip.

And so I'm going to put the whole story down here, straight, so those who read it may know the sin was mine, not Jeff's alone, and that I'll never stop paying for it.

Fresh off a Kansas farm, I went to work in Jeff Winter's grocery in Mercerton the summer I was nineteen and he was twenty-nine. A smalltown grocery, it was a long, narrow building with a single counter down the center, built by Jeff's parents who left him the business. I liked it there, the flurry of women shopping for supper groceries, the crowded Saturdays, the kids buying candy after school. It was hard work, but I was a tall, slim, strong girl. Stacking canned goods and shifting apple baskets didn't bother me.

Jeff was actually little taller than I was, but the straight, sturdy width of his shoulders, the way he carried himself and the way he walked, so swiftly and firmly, made up in masculine vigor for his not being a six-footer. Beside Jean Shelton, the small, pretty redhead who worked in the drugstore across Main Street, Jeff loomed big and handsome. I used to watch him crossing the street in the slack time in the afternoons to have a coke and talk with Jean, and even then, before I knew I loved him, something in his movements, in his dark, crisp hair tapered against the back of his neck, in his lean, strong hands thrust carelessly in his trouser pockets, disturbed me more than I could understand.

During those first months, Jean used to stop at the store when she quit work at five. She'd spend most of her time talking and laughing with Jeff, her gray-green eyes sparkling up at him,



"Get out!" I cried. "You're not welcome in this store any more—either the back or the front!"

her short, cute legs taking her nimbly up and down the aisle, following him. But sometimes she talked to me, too. We were almost friends, I guess. She was the one who advised me to have an end curl in my dark, straight hair.

"And you ought to wear lots of red and orange," she said one day critically. "With dark hair and eyes and skin, red's gorgeous. Now me—" she stroked her own round, milk-white arm complacently—"I need blues and greens."

Perhaps I misled you when I said I came from a Kansas farm. Really, I came from a succession of farms in Kansas and neighboring states, each farm poorer than the last. As the daughter of a tenant



"Aren't you being pretty old-fashioned?" she mocked. "After all, what's a kiss between friends?"

farmer who never seemed to get along with his landlords and was consequently moving each year, I had never been able to dress well or have the cosmetics and ornaments any girl loves. But now I had a settled, steady job, and except for an occasional bill given to Ma, I could spend most of it on myself.

I followed Jean's advice in clothes and make-up just as I was later to act on what she told me about Jeff. Who was I, so shy and green, to ignore Jean's wise admonitions? Didn't all the boys gather around the soda fountain to be near her? Even after it was generally known that she was engaged to Jeff, didn't men still try to date her? Most of all, didn't she have Jeff trailing around after her so closely he couldn't see any other woman? (Continued on page 56)

What greater punishment is there for a woman than to have to stand by while the world condemns the man she loves for a sin really hers?

PUBLIC HERO No. 1. That's what the newspapers called me, Pat Stacey, while I lay in the hospital, a couple of slugs in me from the guns of the rats who had shot down Patrolman Donnelly. They sort of ran out of adjectives praising my courage in grabbing up the pistol of the fallen policeman and shooting it out with the gangsters. There were reporters, photographers, and newsreel men flocking around my bedside the next day, telling me that I was just about the greatest guy in Chicago, but none of them meant anything compared to the thrill I got when Nora, my wife, leaned over my bedside, and whispered, "Oh, Pat, you shouldn't have risked your life so recklessly. But, darling, I'm so proud of you!"

Proud of me! That was all the medicine I needed, for these last few years the wife I adored hadn't

The minute the doctor would permit, photographers, reporters, and newsreel men flocked around my bed. Nora was proud as punch

HERO FOR A DAY

He little guessed, when the newspapers proclaimed him a hero, that one day he would have given anything never to have been on the front page





had much reason to be proud of me. It's hell when the woman in the family is bringing home the dough, or most of it, as my little wife had been doing since shortly after our marriage. Her salary as buyer for the women's gloves and bags department in Thornton's Department store was just about three or four times as much as I could earn driving a taxicab.

It hadn't always been that way. When we were married, Nora was only an assistant buyer and I was the ace copywriter for the store, earning good money. But then Leonard Briggs had come in as general manager, and a month later I was out on my ear. "Nothing against your work, Stacey," he'd informed me, his icy gray eyes avoiding mine. "It's just that I'm bringing in my own copywriter who knows the layouts and type of copy I favor."

Conditions had changed a lot in the six years I had worked at Thornton's. I tried every department store and advertising agency in the city, but it was always, "Sorry, Stacey, we're overmanned right now. Leave your name and address, and we'll get in touch with you if something turns up."

Nothing turned up. We would have had to give up our tastefully furnished little three-room apartment if Nora hadn't been promoted from assistant buyer to head of gloves and

bags with a corresponding increase in salary. Of course she had to work harder, and many an evening she wouldn't leave the office until after ten. I knew that sometimes Briggs would have sandwiches sent up to his office and Nora and he would have a bite together. There was no reason for jealousy in that, but I'd find myself resenting Briggs fiercely. A man who's being supported by his wife can't think rationally. He can only brood, as I did, wonder whether there's not something lacking in him; wonder how long a woman can keep on loving a failure, particularly a woman as beautiful and smart as Nora.

She wasn't very pleased when I came home and told her I was driving a hack. But I told her bluntly, "I've got to be earning some money, Nora, for the sake of my own self-respect. Naturally I'm keeping my eyes open for a real job.

But until one turns up, I won't be sponging on you."

Well, two years passed. There were just no jobs to be had. Plenty of men envied me the twenty or twenty-five dollars I was able to earn by working a ten-hour shift.

Do you wonder that I got what psychologists call an inferiority complex, that I began interpreting Nora's murmured, "Oh, please, Pat, I'm too tired tonight," as evidence she was falling out of love with me rather than as proof of her weariness? Many a time when she got home near midnight, I'd have to bite my tongue to keep back some jealous remark. It wasn't that I distrusted my sweet wife. It was just that I was losing all faith in myself, all belief that I was enough of a man to hold her love.

And then came the break! The break which I thought was to make me—instead of bringing on heartbreak and tragedy.

I was waiting for the traffic light to change when the shot rang out. Backfire, I thought, but the red-headed traffic cop on the corner knew better. Like a flash he hopped on the running board

of my cab. "Must be the Runson Mills," he yelled. "Payday today. Two down, two to your left—and step on it!"

I stepped on the gas, took that turn doing over sixty, my brakes shrieking as I jammed them on the last split second. The policeman clung grimly, his left arm wrapped around my closed door, his right holding his revolver. In just a minute we reached the gates of the large paper plant. Two men came running out. They were making for a black car about fifty yards away when the red-headed cop jumped from the running board of my cab.

He never had a chance. They started pumping lead into him before he had time to regain his balance and fire a shot. The blue coat went down, the blood streaming from his shoulder.

I was sitting tight in my cab. There was no use throwing away my life in a vain attempt to stop two killers. But then one of the gunmen did something which made me see red. His dark face convulsed with hate, he ran closer to the policeman and deliberately fired two shots into his limp form, laughing shrilly as he did it!

That got me! I was out of my cab and running to pick up the cop's gun when the other gangster started shooting at me. I knew that I should have flopped over and played dead, but

"Quit my job?" she echoed shrilly. "Be dependent on what you choose to turn over to me after giving most of it to that woman?"

all that mattered was getting my hands on that gun. I grabbed it up from the sidewalk, knelt on one knee, and as deliberately as if I were out with my National Guard company, I started throwing lead. The first shot I fired got the dark-faced rat who had killed the policeman. Even as he went down, I felt a hammer blow in my chest, then the blood rushing from my body. It was hate which kept me from collapsing, kept me shooting until the other gunman went down—but not until he had planted another bullet in me. Then the lights went out.

When I came to, hours later, I was in the hospital, my chest all bandaged up and weak as a baby. Nora was there, white-faced but proud as punch of her husband. No wonder, for the minute the doctor would permit, that room was flooded with reporters and cameramen. They couldn't seem to get enough pictures of me. I was certainly hero for a day! I heard one of them say, "What a break! The hero's even handsome as a collar ad. We'll plaster that face of his all over the front page."

They certainly did! Not only that first day but plenty of times thereafter. The police commissioner came to my bedside and made me some sort of honorary member of the department. I remember what the newsreel men induced him to say as he made the presentation. "There's not a policeman in this city who's not grateful to you, Pat Stacey, for getting those cop killers," he said gruffly. Then added the prepared wisecrack, "So when you're well enough to get back to hacking, you needn't worry about traffic tickets in the future."

"Thanks, Commissioner," I said just as the newsreel men had coached, "and if I get any tickets, I'm coming straight to you."

As soon as we were alone, I told Nora the great news. "Elliot Black, president of the Runsun Mills, was here this morning. He's plenty appreciative because I saved his \$8,000 payroll. He's paying my hospital expenses—plus a month's convalescent trip to Florida," I told her exultantly, "including your expenses, too. We'll have a second honeymoon, darling! And Yours Truly is through hacking! Black's promised me a job in his organization when I get back from Florida!"

Those few weeks in the hospital were the happiest in years. I was no longer an unknown cab driver but a public hero getting the best of attention, with a stream of newspaper people and police detectives dropping in to praise me.

That very first night away from the hospital, I was jolted back into reality—and by my own wife!

"I won't be able to go with you, Pat darling," she declared, her blue eyes begging for understanding. "You see, I've been promoted to buying for the whole floor, and I have to leave for New York on a buying expedition tonight. I'll be there a month or six weeks," she said. "You won't mind going to Florida alone, will you, Pat?"

"Mind? You bet I will!" I exploded. "You're my wife and you're coming with me—not with Leonard Briggs!"



The blood flowed from her face. "What are you saying, Pat?" she whispered.

"You know very well that Briggs makes that trip too," I cried jealously. "That's why he's promoted you so suddenly. And that guy doesn't give anything away for nothing."

"Pat, you're insulting me—not Mr. Briggs," she said tautly. "Is that what you think of—your wife?"

"I wish to God you were just my wife and not a career woman!" I said bitterly.

"And whose fault is that?" she flared. "If I were married to a man who could make a decent living, I wouldn't have to work myself to death. It's my salary which has been standing between us and starvation. And now you want me to turn down the promotion I've slaved for just because you're jealous of my employer."

At the jibe about her salary supporting us, the blood rushed to my head, and I said thickly, "If you go with him, you and I are through, Nora."

"Can I rely on that?" She laughed shrilly. The sound maddened me. I didn't stop to think that she had been over-



All that first week in Miami I found myself waiting for Nora's letter rather than enjoying myself. She knew the hotel I was to stay at, but even if I'd wanted to write her, I didn't know where to address my letter. The store might or might not forward her mail.

If only Nora had been with me, it would have been fun living in a swanky hotel, waited on hand and foot as if I were a millionaire instead of a hack driver, sprawled out on the white sand, or swimming in the clear blue waters, feeling the strength rapidly returning to my body. I missed Nora more and more as my body grew tanned and hard. I soon got tired of movies night after night.

That was what made me linger in my hotel lobby one evening. It was more fun to watch the human parade in the palatial hotel. Millionaires, socialites, actors and actresses whose faces were dimly familiar rubbed shoulders with hard-faced men and beautiful women.

I recognized Lefty Stevens immediately. The racketeer's lean, aquiline features had been featured plenty in newspapers. He was reputed to have a finger in every underworld pie in Chicago. A killer, too, was the gossip, though the D.A. had never been able to hang anything on him. Yet he looked every inch the gentleman, I reflected, as I noticed his well-cut clothing and listened to his pleasant voice exchanging a few remarks with the hotel clerk.

Then Lefty Stevens came over to me.

"So Cleone's been here!" I broke in grimly. "I might have known that this would happen sooner or later!"

working this last month to insure her promotion, that she was on edge, that I had just insulted her horribly.

"You can!" I said grimly, then threw my hat and coat on and banged the door behind me.

I walked and walked, kicking the snow viciously from my path. After half an hour or so I found myself frozen and tired. I stepped into a bar for a drink. The whisky helped warm me up. It also made my anger and self-righteous resentment grow instead of diminishing. I found myself looking back, remembering that it was Briggs who had fired me. Perhaps he had done it just so as to get me out of his way in the store, leave him a clear path for Nora. He had promoted her afterward!

By the time I got back to the house, Nora had gone already. There was still time for me to get her before her train left the station, but I was too sore to bother.

That same resentment still possessed me when I left for Florida. She had had no business throwing it up to me that only her salary had kept us going. It was up to her to make the first step toward a reconciliation, I told myself hotly.

"Aren't you Pat Stacey?" he asked, with a friendly grin. As I admitted my identity, he added, "I'm Lefty Stevens. You pushed me off the front page for a while." He laughed.

Then he studied me speculatively for a moment. If you're free tonight, how about making the rounds as my guest? I'm at loose ends—and, just confidentially, I'm curious to see what makes a public hero click. I'm more used to the public enemy." He grinned disarmingly.

I couldn't resist his grin. What did I have to lose by being sociable? I was certainly sick of my own company.

Our first stop was the dog-racing track. Stevens dropped at least a grand there without batting an eye, then we started making a tour of the night spots in town—and Miami has plenty!

Lefty proved to be completely different from the mental picture I'd had of a racketeer; well educated, able to talk about the theater, books, music, yet frankly admitting that all of his activities were on the shady side of the law. He seemed to take a fancy to me, for when we returned to our hotel early the next morning, he said, "Pat, I've enjoyed your company. Too many of my associates are murderers—I mean, of the English language," he added, laughing. "You have education, brains. I don't see how you ever came to be a cab driver. What's the idea?" (Continued on page 66)



"You've a snug nest here,
young lady. May I drop in
sometime—just for a chat?"

He promised it would be a last date to end all dates, and then she would be free to forget him. But, instead, it stamped him on her memory forever

WE PLAYED WITH *Emotions*

MY PHOTOGRAPH is stained with blood, and so is my conscience. And this secret is known only to one other person, the one who shares my guilt.

Dick's warm, concentrated rushing, beginning the first night we met, put me on fire with love. He was the one man in the world for me, I knew. I didn't pause to wonder if he really felt as deeply toward me. Being an attractive girl, I didn't doubt that I could marry the man of my choice.

The way Dick acted toward me—waiting practically every evening in the lobby of the office building where I worked, phoning each morning to hear my voice at the beginning of the day, telling me again and again how much he cared—seemed assurance that a blissful marriage was right around the corner.

But after four or five months of enthusiastic rushing, Dick changed. There was no outright break, no quarrel, no misunderstanding. The trouble was that I'd been at his beck and call, dropped other men from my life, let him become so sure of me that for Dick the excitement of the chase was over. He knew I'd marry him any day he asked me to.

And then Dick discovered that he wasn't ready for marriage; not temperamentally ready, that is. Yes, he was twenty-nine, mature enough in years, with a good job and no family responsibilities. But subtly, and by not dating me so frequently, he started a campaign to unsell me on what he had sold me.

As a matter of fact, I didn't want to rush into marriage. I wasn't attempting to trap Dick into committing himself. I simply wanted our romance to continue as it had been. No other man interested me even a little bit since knowing Dick. And, living alone in a one-room apartment, I grew frantic with loneliness as well as jealous fears when he began to spend week ends out of town with friends he was beginning to see again.

The week ends used to be our most precious time together, especially Sunday "brunch," the breakfast at lunch time featured by a leading hotel dining room to attract smart New Yorkers—glamour debs and their boy friends, young matrons from café society and their latest husbands, and always three or four Hollywood or stage celebrities.

One crisp, sunny September morning, I faced another solitary Sunday, with no hope of hearing from Dick until Monday when he might or might not phone me at the office. On Friday, when he'd taken me to a show, he'd told me he was to spend the week end at the country home of an important business contact, adding later, when he kissed me

good night, "See you, darling, when I get back." He'd mentioned no specific time or place. More and more often, we were parting after dates on that vague note of uncertainty.

The little apartment I was usually so proud of seemed to stifle me. I knew I couldn't eat breakfast there alone. So I dressed in my best and took a bus uptown. I had decided to have breakfast at the hotel by myself. It would be expensive, but I'd make it my principal meal of the day.

I little dreamed that this impulsive idea born of sheer loneliness was to have such sinister consequences!

The space in front of the entrance to the dining room was even more crowded than usual. As I waited in line with the rest standing at the velvet ropes until the head waiter could give them tables, I glanced into the dining room.

Almost the first person my eyes lit on was Dick. He was at a large table, so close that I could see the high lights in his gray eyes, narrowed in laughter at what one of the good-looking girls in the party of six was saying. The waiter was taking their orders.

Dick had lied about going away. He wanted a week end of freedom to make other dates, new contacts! I knew there was no other girl seriously in his life—not yet, anyway. But he liked his social freedom and felt that I was depriving him of it. My mind whirled as I fled back into the hotel lobby and sank shakily onto a sofa.

When the first shock of grief and resentment passed, I saw my own foolishness. I had been too easy, made myself too cheap. Not easy in giving myself physically, nor cheap in my personality. Dick had never possessed me, and knew he never could before marriage. But there are other ways in which a girl can make herself easy and cheap. I had done it by never refusing him a date, no matter at what short notice, since we'd met. I had done it by showing my feelings too sincerely; by being ecstatically pleased when he took me to nice places, such as this hotel; by not attempting to hide from him the love that clamored in my heart. He knew too well that all he needed to do was ask me and I'd marry him as soon as it could be managed. I hadn't made him chase me, nor fight against another man's rivalry. I had dropped all my men friends.

As these thoughts spun in my head, I remembered another man. At that very moment, there was a letter from him in my handbag—a letter I had intended to ignore. And now I took out the envelope marked "Please Forward." I hadn't seen him in over a year, (Continued on page 75)

I FORCED HIM

THE circle of eyes around me in the courtroom glinted coldly as if to say, "You're getting just what you deserve, young lady." Mark was the only one who didn't look at me that way. He stood, staring straight ahead, not seeming to hear or feel a thing. But I was wildly defiant, fighting desperately for a last chance at happiness. I faced them all, Mark's glowering father, his weeping mother, the straight-lipped, white-haired judge, and my own father, sitting apart, pale and shaken. "You can't annul our marriage," I cried. "Mark and I love each other—we've belonged to each other. We knew it was real. That's why we got married. We—"

"Fortunately this marriage can be dissolved," the judge interrupted brusquely. "You're seventeen and Mark's twenty. Minors, both of you." He looked at me, at my blond hair, at my young slimness. "A boy with Mark Fenton's background feels called upon to marry a girl after committing certain youthful indiscretions. So you eloped in order to make it seem exciting instead of just one more of those sad mistakes."

"Mark," I begged, "say it wasn't like that!"

He stood erect, his jaw clenching nervously. Suddenly he turned and in his eyes I saw bewilderment and anguish. But I saw love, too, the love that had throbbed and flamed between us. "No," he began slowly, "it wasn't like that. I do l—"

"Oh!" Mark's mother gasped. "I think—I'm going to faint."

Mark whirled around to catch her, but she didn't faint. She just clung to him, weeping and

"You weren't ashamed of our love then, but you are now!"



TO CHOOSE

She built her marriage on a broken promise that was always to stand between them



moaning, "My boy, my poor boy!" I saw through her ruse.

"Mark," I began, but the irate voice of Mr. Fenton cut over mine: "Young man, can't you see what you're doing to your mother? The judge has annulled your marriage. Every bit of your damn foolishness is over and finished. We're leaving now."

Mark paled, but not once did he glance at me. He was giving up without a fight, I realized wildly—Mark, who had held me in his arms, who had been my husband for just a day.

"Mark," I blurted out, "your mother only pretended to faint because she was afraid you'd say how much you loved me."

He turned slowly. "Ginny, how could you say such a thing?" he asked hollowly. "How could you?"

He left then and my heart froze. I'd played straight into his family's hands. They'd won.

Suddenly my mother was beside me. "We must go home, Virginia," she said softly. "Come along, dear."

I wept then, deep, racking sobs. My mother had never berated me once for eloping with Mark, although I'd hurt her deeply. I was all she had. Father had died when I was five, and she'd worked ever since, worked hard to get her buyer's job in the biggest department store in our town. She liked Mark and would have forgiven us, but the Fentons saw to it that she fell in line with their views "for Virginia's own good."

All through that long night I lay wide-eyed, burned dry of tears. Could it have been just yesterday morning, I asked myself, that Mark and I had driven into the next county where the funny, old bespectacled town clerk had married us, not even looking up when I fibbed about my age? We'd been such babies, believing that if we were married, our parents would see how real our love was. We'd come straight back to tell Mark's family, and they'd torn every shred of beauty and meaning away from the (Continued on page 54)

"Ginny! Stop it!" Mark shot out hoarsely. "You mustn't say—"

There were those who scorned her as notorious, those who secretly envied her the exciting life she led—but none suspected her real desires

"THE Notorious Nedwicks," they called us, my cousin Wilma and I, Helen, alike enough to be sisters. "Cut out of the same bolt of goods!" Trexford folks didn't mean that kindly.

But we weren't. Oh, we had the same waving copper hair and starry gray-blue eyes; the same flair for making cheap dresses look like Fifth Avenue creations. But inside we were different—terribly! I wanted—well, what God has given me now, a good man to love and life running like a peaceful river, tucked away in a quiet little town.

Wilma's turbulent desires matched the flamboyant beauty of her body, the proud curves of lips that could drip honey or hiss out bitter vituperation. She craved the excitement of the wheel that spins to the tune of men's checks, jewels, and ten-dollar cover charges.

Yet it was I who got the Chicago penthouse and unlimited charge accounts—and what went with them! Naturally it was hard for Wilma to take. But the roots of her bitterness toward me went deeper—way back to a foolish nurse who poisoned Wilma's little soul, planted the horror that there was something shady and disgraceful about her birth, so she could never command respect.

Jerry looked astonished as Wilma threw herself into my husband's arms



They Expected the



"Wake up, you silly little doll," Jim said sharply. "To me, Helen will always be tops. And don't let me hear of your spreading gossip—"

One day, in a rage, Wilma sank her teeth into Nurse's wrist, who retaliated sharply with, "Little alley cat! What can you expect from a kid who never had a pa and whose mamma—"

Wilma scratched and bit. I hit out in her defense, till we all three ended in a crying jag.

There were other things, whispers, winks and sneers at school—till one day Mother put an arm around Wilma and me, saying, "I guess it's kindest to be honest. I want you both for my little daughters, always. Wilma's mother was my dearest sister, so—"

"But I am as good as Helen. I did have a daddy like she has Uncle Nick?" Wilma demanded hoarsely.

"Yes, dear," she replied gently, "but he was married to somebody else. That's why people imagine they have the right to say ugly things. You did no wrong, Wilma. Now, we'll never speak of this again, nor think of it."

I began to cry. Wilma's icy face scared me. "I'm glad they're both dead! I hate them and everybody! I will be as good as Helen, I will!"

So I was never allowed to have a toy or dress unless Wilma had as good or better. All invitations had to include us both. But the hurt had gone deep and festered. Wilma couldn't accept Mother's generous, easy philosophy. Her sense of inferiority insisted that she had to "best" me at everything, snatch my treasures and—queerest of all—find peace only when I was smeared and blackened.

I didn't realize this till the smash-up of my marriage. It started so romantically when Chad West, handsome amateur aviator, crashed in the field behind our house and staggered into our kitchen to be patched and bandaged. I loved him long before I knew he ran through fifty thousand unearned dollars a year and still managed to be in debt.

I loved his laugh and crazy dashing at life. I'd have married him if his father had been nightwatchman instead of owner of the huge grain company. Wilma wouldn't, but she was crazy to have what Chad
(Continued on page 49)

Worst of Me

**Pampered and petted all her life,
she'd never had to fight for
anything—until that day another
woman threatened her marriage**

I DIDN'T really want a divorce from Mac. When I said I hated him, it was a lie. When I told him I wanted never to see him again, I knew life would be a bitter, empty blankness without him. I loved Mac. It was lashing me, eating into me that I would never have what I wanted from him—his single-hearted attention and devotion. Jealous, hurt as I'd never been hurt in my life before, I wasn't responsible for what I was saying or doing.

And nobody, of all those who loved me, said, "Wait. Save that marriage. Retrace your steps, and find out where you, too, are wrong." They meant to be sympathetic when they said, "He never loved you. How do you know he was working those nights when he left you alone? Remember Marjory Howorth? Remember what you saw with your own eyes?"

I'll have to go back. It won't be hard to explain, because you probably know many children like me. In these days of restricted families and childless marriages, they're more the rule than the exception.

I was an only child, an only grandchild. I had a half-dozen gay young uncles who boasted about eluding the bonds of matrimony. I had three career-girl aunts who didn't want to get married either, and two fashionable married ones who spoke indefinitely of having a baby someday. It didn't materialize in my childhood. I was all the baby, all the younger generation, there was.

And Gramp, Grammy, and all the aunts and uncles fell over each other to give little Anita a lot of ideas which a merciless world would have to beat out of her someday.

They spelled out "bright" and "adorable" at an age where I'd have had to be a moron not to understand what they meant.

They even talked in my hearing of my milk-white skin and blue eyes that came from Dad's side of the family, and the rich, tumbling dark curls that were so like Mother's.

high before. Mother protested indignantly but helplessly when over-zealous relatives turned casual little high-school get-togethers into elaborate parties. Dad went into a futile rampage at the fur coat, the glittering evening bag that he rightly insisted belonged in no school kid's wardrobe.

I didn't mind. I loved being the center of attention. The more fuss the family made over me, the better I liked it. What was wrong with me was becoming an obsession. I didn't only want an audience; I needed it. I'd probably have suffered an actual shock if I'd been deprived of it. But, as I said, I didn't know that. Fate saved me for the grand, terrible calling to account that very nearly wiped out of my life all I wanted on earth.

Oh, she took her time about catching up with me! I finished high school in a pink-and-white glory of flowers and ruffles and admiration. I drove my own car to junior college. I was named queen of a men's college carnival. Between the ages of eight-

Love on his


Lighthearted Uncle Rolly thought it a great joke to supply the bobsled whose purchase Dad withheld as a punishment. When Mother said I didn't need another party dress, Aunt Janet didn't see anything wrong in rushing down to buy the coveted butterfly-yellow thing in Crosby's window. When I was in a school play or recital, the family badgered their friends into buying tickets. I was the center of more devotion and attention than most people get in a lifetime. Naturally, I took it for granted. I'd never known anything else. And for years nothing happened to teach me that things can be different.

You'd have thought nobody ever graduated from junior

een and twenty-two, I was engaged no less than five times.

Each time I announced an engagement, the family threw parties, gave me presents and exulted with me. Every time I broke one, they sympathized, agreed with me and fell over each other, helping me to forget.

I taught kindergarten. The aunts and uncles couldn't say enough for my nobility. Well, I liked my work—but it was nice to be able to collapse in the midst of an attentive group and explain that teaching took so much out of one. The aunts planned class parties, made adorable prizes and favors. The uncles made our Christmas trees and holiday decorations the best in all the school. My pupils said I was the prettiest,



At my bitter protest that he didn't love me, he stifled me into silence with a savage kiss. "I wish I'd never met you," he said grimly

terms

nicest teacher there was. Parents gushed. The principal congratulated me publicly. By this time, nothing short of a thunderbolt could have brought me back to earth.

That thunderbolt was Mac Laner. Meeting Mac bewildered me. If I hadn't fallen so instantly and desperately in love with him, I'd have hated him. Mac was different from other people. I wanted more adoration from him than I had from others—and he seemed to give me less. I wanted to be the center of his interest, and he always seemed to be absorbed in something else.

Even the night I met him. Men usually picked me out of a crowd. It was different that night. (Continued on page 69)

Not until he was about to lose her forever did he realize that the only woman he'd ever really wanted to marry was she who twice had stepped aside so that he could wed another

ELLEN kept warning me that a doctor has no right to expect he can marry until he has finished his interning and established himself in his practice. I knew it was common sense. But when you get to be twenty-four and twenty-five, and those with whom you started college are nearly all married, and start inviting you to meet the wonder girl and have dinner in their happy little home, you start getting that well-known restless feeling.

Ellen had been terribly in earnest about my medical career since she had helped me dissect my first rabbit to find out why it had died suddenly one summer when I was twelve or so.

She herself was going to be a surgical nurse and never once wavered in her efforts toward that goal.

There are catch descriptions for people like Ellen. We say they are "the salt of the earth." We say they have a "heart of gold."

But we don't marry them when we are young. Brown and fresh and scrubbed-looking, that was Ellen, with steady, frank brown eyes and a quick smile that was her biggest claim to beauty. But romance? Any quickening of the senses when I was near Ellen? I could as soon have got romantic about the middle-aged superintendent of nurses at the hospital where I was interning.

No, it was Lois who had me in a raging, beating storm from the moment I met her my first year of interning. She was a little probationer, barely eighteen, and anything prettier and sweeter than Lois in her little striped uniforms couldn't be dreamed of.

I remember telling Ellen about her right away. Ellen was working at the hospital in our home town of Montmorency by then, already actually launched on her beloved career.

"El, she's wonderful," I raved, the way you can to an old friend. "Blond curly hair and brown eyes," I described triumphantly. "Complexion like honey and cream."

"Any gray matter?" inquired Ellen practically.

"Enough," I laughed. "That isn't it—"

"You bet it isn't!" snorted Ellen. "It's just the old biological urge, to put it crassly, Penn. Softness, curves—"

I refused to be angry.

"Have it your way, Ellen. But wait till you see her. You'll fall too."

"Possibly," said Ellen dryly. "But I'm not apt to see her. Your hospital is two hundred miles away."

"You'll see her. We're being married in May."

"Penn Fielding, you wouldn't be such a fool!" I was startled at her vehemence. "You've another year to intern.

"Your jealousy is making both you and me a laughing stock. I've never given you any reason—"



I Picked

You can't even support yourself, let alone a wife as well."

I glared at her, because of course she was right. That's what made me so mad.

"Of course," she went on more mildly, "I always knew it would be hard for you to hold out against marriage, Penn. You're just constitutionally a pushover for it. But do you think you're being fair to Lois?"

"What do you mean I'm a pushover for marriage?" I demanded angrily. "Lois hasn't tried to inveigle me into it. I've had a deuce of a time persuading her."

"What you mean is that you can't have her any other way," Ellen said bluntly. "I don't blame her for that."

I flushed to the roots of my crisply curly brown hair. She'd hit the nail on the head so accurately it wasn't comfortable. But she was wrong about one thing. Lois had been mine,



"A fine surgeon you think I'll make, if that's your opinion of me," I said heatedly, unreasonably hurt.

"I think you'll make one of the finest surgeons in North America," she said, "if only you keep your head. Couldn't Lois wait just two or three more years?"

I laughed shortly. What did steady old Ellen know about the hunger of love, how it drove you till you couldn't work, couldn't eat, couldn't sleep?

"There's no reason why we should. The folks will look out for her while I finish. I'll more than repay them when I get to practicing."

"You've already contracted to pay them for your expensive seven years of training, haven't you?" Ellen asked. "That won't be less than seven thousand dollars. You'll be carrying a pretty heavy load the first five or ten years you practice."

"Damn it, Ellen!" I burst out. "Don't you want me to be happy?"

"More than anything else in the world. More than I want you to be successful," Ellen said in a low voice. I was startled to see that she was blinking tears off her lashes.

I put a hand over one of her square, brown, capable ones.

"Why, Ellen!"

She snatched her hand away.

"I just don't want you to make a mess of your life," she said brusquely.

"I won't! Not with Lois back of me. When you see her, you'll understand."

Three days after our hurried wedding, I brought Lois home and prepared to dash back to the hospital and my work. But I took time to have her meet Ellen before I left.

She came down the hospital steps and strode toward our car in her flat white nurse's oxfords,

The Wrong Women

one time, one sweet spring night when heady, hungry emotions were too much for both of us and we'd been swept away. It was that foretaste of heaven that had made me know I had to protect Lois. Afterward, she'd cried in my arms and I'd felt like a heel, but I'd known that now my need of her was passionately roused and would never sleep again.

"You're more emotional than the average person," Ellen said quietly. "You're idealistic and sensitive, and so you'll always be in hot water about something. It's just in you."

her white cap rakishly askew on her brown hair. Ellen could never get her caps on straight. It was the one flaw in her professional perfection, and I liked to tease her about it.

When Lois saw her, before Ellen quite reached the car, she said, "Why, Penn, how plain she is! From your praise I thought she must be beautiful."

Well, Ellen wasn't pretty, but I liked her looks. Healthy and wholesome and good, that was Ellen. With a smile, I watched her shake hands with Lois, her eyes appraising.

"You're a little bit of a thing, aren't you?" Ellen observed. "I might have known that's the kind Penn would pick. I hope you'll be very happy. But I warn you, Penn requires a strong hand on the check rein."

Lois laughed, and the three of us sat in the car and talked awhile, because Ellen had to go right back on duty, an accident at the wire mill having brought in half a dozen emergency cases late in the afternoon.

"What we need in Montmorency," said Ellen, telling us about it, "is another good hospital and a good surgeon. That's where Penn comes in," she added to Lois. "He'll have his own hospital someday, taking orders from no one, if you and I push him hard enough."

"I don't believe in nagging a man," Lois declared. "Maybe after we have our own home, he can think about his hospital. He's talked to me a lot about it."

"It's been the dream of his life," Ellen said bluntly. "I think you'll make a mistake to minimize the importance of it—not just to Penn, but to your marriage."

THE next year was hard. It was hard being two hundred miles away from my little yellow-haired, brown-eyed bride. She didn't take our separation well either. I could get home only once a month, and each time parting from her was an ordeal. She clung to me and cried and told me how unhappy she was.

"I don't have any fun, Penn," she wept. "At first I was invited out a little, but since I can't entertain in return, they soon stopped asking. And I have no clothes."

"It's just a little while, darling," I'd comfort her. "Just till I get to practicing. Then there'll be money for clothes for you, and you can entertain your friends. The folks are good to you, aren't they?" I added anxiously.

"They're not mean," Lois said discontentedly. "But they never let me forget it isn't my own home."

"They're not the demonstrative kind," I apologized.

Nor the complaining kind. I could see that Lois made herself of no help to Mother, that she was just a guest in the house and required a great deal of waiting on. When I remonstrated with her gently, she burst into tears.

"I don't know how to help her!" she sobbed. "I'm so awkward she'd rather do things herself than try to tell me how. Don't scold me, Penn. I can't bear it!"

Then I'd curse myself for making her cry, and she'd be soft and sweet and forgiving, and I'd forget everything except that she gave me all the happiness I knew, was the one bright spot of all my long, hard grueling years of work and study.

But finally the last hard year was over, and I was ready to plunge off on my own into practice. And I wanted to be strictly on my own. I turned down offers for junior surgeon positions in several hospitals, including that in my home town of Montmorency.

Both my parents and Lois were aghast about that. So was the hospital board. It didn't improve their opinion of me any, either, when I snatched their best nurse right out from under their noses. But there had never been any question but that Ellen would come to me when I hung out my shingle.

She came on a meager salary at first, but

I increased it as I could. Montmorency is a busy manufacturing town of ten thousand, and after the first few months, my practice grew.

Now Lois was more content. I gave her as much money as I could spare. It wasn't much, goodness knows, after my office rent, Ellen's salary, and my debt to my family was paid. But it was enough to buy her a few pretty clothes and give her a little pocket money with which to while away her time.

I had thought that the first thing Lois would demand, sooner than I could manage it maybe, would be to get away from the folks into some place of our own. But time went on, and she said nothing. In fact, it was I who brought up the subject about a year after I started to practice.

"I think I can swing a little apartment

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for you now, darling," I said with pardonable pride. "You go ahead and pick it out. Two or three rooms, furnished, not too high rent. Fifty's about my limit."

"You couldn't look at anything I'd live in for less than a hundred," Lois said. "No, Penn. We'll wait till we can have the home we've always talked about. I'd rather have a little car of my own. I have a few friends now, and if I had something to get about in, I wouldn't have to be dependent upon them to pick me up and take me about all the time. I hate to impose on them so."

I looked at her soberly. She was pretty as ever; prettier in fact with a new vivacity about her, now that she had nice clothes and was having a better time. I wondered sometimes what she did with her time. I knew she had learned to play golf and that she spent a lot of time in the beauty shop and that she belonged to a couple of bridge

clubs and shopped a lot. But she never read a book, asked me a question about my work, or gave me much companionship.

Of course, I was working like a dog, and couldn't be sure of even one free evening or week end, and it wasn't often I missed Lois. She was still sweet and responsive to my love, and I told myself we were happy.

And so I bought her the little car she wanted, and plodded along until the time came when I knew I was in a position to take a larger suite of offices. Ellen was as excited about it as I was.

"You're on your way, Penn!" she cried jubilantly. Then more soberly, "Is Lois satisfied to have you take larger offices and not have her own apartment yet?"

"She's satisfied," I said briefly. For it was beginning to occur to me that Lois didn't want the responsibility of a home of her own. And she definitely didn't want children yet.

"I'm young yet, Penn!" she protested when I talked about it. "There's plenty of time."

I'd have postponed my fine new offices if she'd been eager for our own apartment and a child. But Lois was content with things the way they were, and I told myself I was too.

ONCE in the new suite of rooms, I had to get a receptionist immediately, for my practice began taking on alarming proportions. I was in despair interviewing applicants. Brash little girls just out of high school, pert and pretty and wearing too much make-up. Or elderly, fussy, old-maidish persons who would have frozen my patients as they gave their names.

I wanted the perfect receptionist for my glamorous setup, and I knew I had her when I interviewed Rhoda Mack.

My heart gave a strange, unnatural lurch when Ellen ushered her in, a little quizzical question in her brown eyes. But Ellen didn't exist for me at the moment.

Rhoda was a lovely creature. I remember thinking in a daze that I'd never be able to afford anything so superlative for my receptionist's desk.

She was tall and dark and willowy, expensively dressed. In the quietest way imaginable, she managed to be spectacular in a fine dark woven suit and crisp white blouse. The only frivolous touch was the tiny scarlet hat she wore on her shining black hair.

And her voice was perfect, too, low and throaty and warm. I was sure it would sound sympathetic and understanding to my patients. But what would you have to pay a paragon like this?

She laughed musically when I brought up the subject, and I found my eyes dwelling on her scarlet mouth, her round white throat.

"I would almost pay you to give me the job," she said frankly. "I'm bored to death in this town. There's nothing to do! After three years in New York, you can imagine how this seems to me. My husband was killed in a plane accident a year ago. My people are here. So I came home."

"Oh, I'm sorry," I muttered. I hadn't noticed that Ellen had introduced her as Mrs. Mack.

"You needn't be," she said with stark simplicity. "He was much older than I.

(Continued on page 45)

Secrets of Famous Glamour Girls



Veronica Lake, of "I Wanted Wings" fame, is the new Hollywood Glamour Girl of Today

THE STARS of screen and radio are, beyond doubt, the most enchanting and glamorous of women. This is because they are always exquisite to look at and—unlike the lilies in the field—they do toil! They lead busy, exciting lives. Their work demands intelligence and study as well as perfection of appearance. So the glamour secrets which they have learned are a guide and inspiration to all of us who want to look our best with a minimum expenditure of time. Here are some tips from the brightest stars of today:

★ Exotic, terrific **Carmen Miranda** could be put down as a very plain woman. She is little—about 5 feet 2—has a slightly outsized nose, wide mouth and average hair. However, Carmen Miranda's actual features are seldom analyzed, for her delirious turbans (they could pass as hampers for picnic lunches anywhere!) and the contagious warmth of her smile and personality wow everyone who meets her. Carmen Miranda says that she deliberately uses unconventional clothes and brilliant colors to make her distinctive from other women—women who are perhaps more classically beautiful. You could do this, too, by specializing in heavy and outlandish jewelry, crazy hats, flamboyant colors and a dark, dark lipstick to emphasize the brightness of your smile.

★ Just as Carmen Miranda admits to the use of daring clothes and colors to emphasize her personality, other stars have depended upon their wardrobes to "set them apart" from the crowd. For example, **Marlene Dietrich** tells us that she managed to separate herself from "the herd" early in her Hollywood days by affecting tailored trousers and jackets for both informal and formal wear. **Janet Gaynor**, as you know, established herself as a "sweet little girl" by wearing colorless nail polish, sensible hats, sub-deb dresses and shoes with low heels.

★ **Hedy Lamarr** bids fair to become the synonym for glamour in our day. Her beauty is natural and ravishing. Her charm is legendary. Ask Hedy how she makes up, dresses up and lives up to all of this, and she will tell you that she "leaves off the ruffles." Here is a beauty secret for you who are blessed with exquisite features. Don't clutter up your heaven-sent gifts with furbelows. Hedy is frequently seen with no make-up for her flawless complexion, for perfect features need no adornment. Hedy wears a simple coiffure. She just parts her hair in the middle, dampens it with water, and combs it into soft waves. She carries hats, but never wears them. She wears clothes with slim, straight lines and a tailored smartness. She wears little jewelry.

★ **Irene Dunne's** strong point is a flair for wearing clothes. She has turned this accomplishment to such good use that she is frequently mentioned as one of America's best dressed women. Yet she does not spend a fabulous sum on clothes. In fact, she can put on a bargain-basement dress and look like a million. It is her posture that does the trick! This is the way Irene Dunne determines the correct posture she should assume. This also serves as an exercise to strengthen the necessary muscles for a graceful carriage!

Stand about three inches from the wall. Bend over at the

FOR BEAUTY'S SAKE By Diana Day

waist, curving the spine until the fingers touch the floor. Slowly rise to standing position, pushing each vertebra one by one against the wall until you are erect, every single vertebra is touching, and the hips are pulled down and in. Now without moving the vertebra from the wall, slowly inch the feet back until they touch the wall. Step out with this posture and you look like a queen.

★ If you think of **Linda Darnell**, then your ears will ring with a soft, sweet voice and you will visualize radiant youth. How does Linda Darnell manage to convey this impression to all who meet her? Well, Linda wisely schooled her voice to a low pitch. (As a rule, women's voices have a tendency to be shrill and high. However, the tone can be lowered through practice.) Linda reads aloud to herself for hours, carefully enunciating each word and ruling out the impulse to slur over certain letters or drop endings. Linda sweeps her hair back from her brow, for the pure expanse of forehead thus revealed lends a candid "little girl" expression to her face. You can follow Linda's glamour tricks and radiate the same type of charm.

★ **Joan Crawford** found her lipstick the key to glamour. Joan says that as long as she made up her mouth in the conventional way, it was difficult to make people realize that she was capable of great emotion. However, when she decided to make full use of color to emphasize her dramatic and expressive mouth, she found important people sat up and took notice of her. Here are some of the make-up tricks she employs:

A rosy shade of lipstick applied in gently rounded bows makes the face appear young and unsophisticated. A cold red shade of color applied in a narrow line to upper and lower lips and stopping short before reaching the corners makes the face look old and "hard." A flaming red color applied freely to a full lower lip and in an almost straight line across the upper lip and carried all the way to the corners of the mouth lends an appearance of worldly sophistication to the face. Keep your lips flexible and lovely by studying mouth expressions in the mirror, perking up drooping corners, opening the mouth wide and closing it to relax tense muscles. Puff the cheeks and blow, pucker your mouth, practice smiling widely.

★ **Loretta Young** admits to emphasizing her appearance of fragility and daintiness. Her beauty achieves an ethereal quality in the role of Lina Varsavina in "Woman of Desire." Soft curls and waves are coaxied into an (Continued on page 44)

Hollywood Reporter

Co-stars in real life as well as in "reel" life are Ida Lupino and hubby, Louis Hayward, whose recent movie, "Ladies in Retirement," was such a grand box-office success



Two favorites whose popularity endures despite new stars on the Hollywood horizon and changing trends in movie entertainment are Loretta Young and Fredric March. Don't miss them in Columbia's "Bedtime Story"

COMING UP!

A musical with a West Indies background is in the making, with Mary Martin (My-Heart-Belongs-to-Daddy girl) in the lead. It's to be called "Happy Go Lucky." Incidentally, everyone says Mary's even prettier since the birth of her little daughter, a phenomenon often noticed even in Hollywood. Eddie Bracken is scheduled to play the lead in Paramount's remaking of "Merton of the Movies." This latest issue will be modern as tomorrow and have plenty of music. Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland will have the rich parts

in Metro's "Babes in Hollywood," which goes into production this spring. James Cagney is busy making a George M. Cohan pix called "Yankee Doodle Dandee," in which Warner Bros. will produce a new starlet, June Millarde. Watch out for her!

ROMANCE OFF THE SCREEN

When you go to see "Sullivan's Travels"—and it's a must!—notice that ring on Veronica Lake's finger. It's her wedding ring, and she refused to remove it during the making of the picture. Truman Bradley gifted Margaret Lindsay with a gorgeous ruby necklace. Ginger Rogers called a halt on the publicity about her alleged romance with George Montgomery. Says Ginger, "It just doesn't exist!" Love can be true in Hollywood, too! That famous "It" girl of some years back, Clara Bow, is well into her eleventh year of wedded bliss. And nobody who has seen them together can deny it's Love with a capital L in Cary Grant's eyes when he looks at the fabulous Barbara Hutton. There's a lot of unhappy rumor, though, of a split-up in the Victor Mature menage. George Raft and Betty Grable are like THAT, and don't believe anything else you hear to the contrary.

PUPPET PICTURES

Something new is on the screens now. It's called puppets and is put out by Paramount and is the idea of a young Hungarian. Instead of drawing thousands of pictures, as is done in the Disney cartoons, lifelike puppets are made and photographed. These give a third-dimension quality to the cartoons. The current one to watch for is called "Rhythm in the Ranks." Nine thousand separate and different puppets were used in its making. This idea is the first threat to the great Walt Disney regime. And speaking of Disney, he's making "Peter Pan" to follow up "Dumbo's" great success. And a full-length cartoon in color is being put together by Hugh Harman, to be known as "King Arthur's Knights."

WHERE YOU'D LEAST EXPECT IT

Producers had to stage a comeback after the slamming around the Hays office gave their glamour girls on the sweater question. And so sex has snuck into—of all things!—Western movies, (Continued on page 40)

Baby Sandy always gets her man! This time it's jolly Bud Costello, who's taking time out to rest between shots of "Ride 'em, Cowboy" for Universal Pix



YOU MAY never have done anything actually wrong for the boys to announce after an evening with you, "Hot dog! I had a date with Susie last night!" and then grin. That grin is the death knell of your reputation. Nobody knows exactly how much it means, and all suspect that it means a lot more than it probably does.

Many girls who have high standards of behavior get that sort of thing said about them now and then. And they never know how much harm it does them. Suppose the man in all the world who could make you happiest is standing by when a boy makes a remark like that about you! It may create a first impression of you which he'll never give you a chance to correct.

Some girls are more afraid the boys will call them prigs than they are of being called fast. They wouldn't be if they'd ever heard men discussing both traits among themselves. When a man wants you to neck with him, he talks as though being a prig is the worst thing on earth. He probably tells you that you can't be a good sport if you're stingy with your kisses. It's all sales talk. Just as likely as not, behind your back he says the opposite. However, the real point is that there's no reason why you should be called

You can be nice without being a prude and enjoy plenty of dates while waiting for Mr. Right to come into your life



WHERE SHOULD A GIRL DRAW THE LINE?

—if she wants to hold her man

BY PATTY PATTON

either fast or a prig. There are two rules which if you follow them scrupulously will keep your reputation as safe as if it were done up in cellophane.

The first is NEVER LET ANY MAN GO TOO FAR. "Too far" is the point at which the emphasis shifts from tenderness and affection to passion. With the man who doesn't care two pins about you, that may happen the moment he touches you, while another man, because he loves you, can hold you very close and kiss you often without its happening.

You needn't fear being called a prig if you stop men at this point. They know as well as you do that it's the danger zone. Neither need you fear that your name will ever be included when the boys get together over a few drinks and talk about the "fun" they've had on recent dates. But the girl who gratifies, even to a small degree, the purely physical side of a man's nature is not only cheapening herself but is offering a blanket invitation to male gossip. If you don't want to raise unnecessary obstacles to your future happiness, steer clear of it altogether.

Rule number two is NO KISSES UNTIL THE END OF YOUR DATE. Every girl knows that caresses have a way of gathering momentum. Henry is very attractive. You don't love him, but you like him a great deal, and you see no reason why he shouldn't put his arm about you while you admire the moon. Half an hour later, your head is on his shoulder. But there's no harm in that, and he has such a comfortable shoulder! You go on talking, and everything seems all right. Then suddenly you're being kissed. It's a wonderful kiss, and it makes you wonder if you don't care about him after all. So you kiss him again. Pretty soon he's holding you very close and kissing you a lot.

The next day, you're thoroughly ashamed of yourself and feel pretty cheap. You know you don't love him, and it was just the moon and so forth. Worst of all, you know that Henry will expect the same thing again. It will be much more difficult to keep him in line now. He'll be angry or hurt or just plain bored if you don't kiss him on your next date, and about the only safe thing you can do is not to give him another date. Too bad! He was such a dear!

All this can be prevented if you stick to your "no kisses until

the end of your date" rule. Until your curfew hour rolls around, try to keep your date on the move and don't let conversation lag. If you have plenty to do and plenty to talk about, even the most hot-blooded male is less insistent about petting. Keep a wide-awake, peppy atmosphere, and you're fairly safe. It's with the dreamy-eyed, relaxed and cuddly-looking girl that the men just can't keep their hands to themselves.

When these tactics fail and, in spite of all your brightness and energy, Jimmy stops his car and starts turning on his charm—very, very sweetly but very, very firmly say, "No, dear, not now. Let's spend the evening getting to like each other even better than we do now, and I'll promise to kiss you before we say good night. It's much more fun as the climax of a lovely date, don't you think?"

If he insists that he can't wait for your kisses, give him a cool little peck and tell him that that's the sort of thing he'll get if he takes them now. If he wants better ones, he'll have to wait until you're ready to give them to him.

On your own doorstep, or in its general vicinity, with the clock's hands assuring you that it's nearly time to go in, you won't have any trouble keeping the situation under control. Without fear of his getting unmanageable, you can give each man the kind of kiss he has honestly won from you. Fred gets that fond but sisterly affair, Jimmy something a little more heartfelt, and the man you really care for deserves the complete surrender of your lips.

Every girl wants to be called nice without being called priggish, to save herself for the right man and still have plenty of dates while she's waiting for him to come along, and to have a good time without cheapening herself to get it. By following these two rules, you can have these things.

Men are really not so difficult to manage as the girls who mismanage them imagine they are. They like nice girls, and they respect a girl for wanting to be nice. It's instinctive with them to try to make you go as far as you will. But, although it hurts their pride and their feelings if you're absolutely untouchable where they're concerned, they want you to draw your own line, to draw it hard and fast and never to go beyond it.

HOT SOUPS FOR COLD DAYS



SOUP PROVENCALE—a "quickie soup." Blend condensed celery and condensed chicken soup. Sprinkle with toasted almonds

SOUP can be the thoroughly acceptable answer to many a menu problem, many a budget problem, many a party problem. A smart cook can put oomph into the soup. She can make spicy, smooth, subtly flavored soups that will make masculine diners beg for more and feminine diners beg for your recipe. Here are some new ideas.

DINNER SOUPS

We'll begin with Peanut Soup. It's an old Southern custom, and so you'd expect a chicken to figure prominently in the recipe. Well, it does. Boil a 4-pound chicken for two hours, or until it is tender. Strain off the stock. Then sauté a minced onion and 2 celery stalks in 4 tablespoons of butter, add 2 tablespoons of flour and blend. When smooth, add the stock slowly, then blend in 1½ pounds of peanut butter. Strain all through a fine sieve, season to taste, and at the last moment add a cup of cream. It's wonderfully good, and you've got the whole chicken left, around which to build the rest of your dinner menu.

Did you ever try Chicken Roquefort Soup? Here's something novel and good. Start off with 2½ cups of chicken soup—which may be canned—add ½ cup of heavy cream, and heat but don't boil. Thicken with 2 tablespoons of flour blended with 3 tablespoons of cold chicken soup. Stir while the soup thickens; there must never be even the suspicion of a lump in good soup. Now add 2 or 3 tablespoons of crumbled Roquefort cheese. Keep the heat low and let it simmer a few minutes. Float a radish or two or a few chives in the soup dish. The flavor is tantalizing.

A Creme Vichysoiss is just as sophisticated as it sounds, and you can name it very proudly to the assembled diners! Slice into bits the white part of 4 medium-sized leeks, cook them slowly in an ounce of sweet butter, and don't let them brown. Add 1½ pints of chicken stock and ¾ of a pound of peeled and quartered Idaho potatoes. Add a pinch of salt, bring all to a boil and simmer for an hour. When cooked, put through a sieve, and then allow the soup to boil slowly for ten minutes more, skimming it carefully from time to time. Pour into a bowl, allow it to become completely cold, then add a pint of light cream. Then strain into another bowl and place in the icebox until ready to serve. There, will that start excited conversation!

A Mock Lobster Soup is made quite easily

Cooking secrets

BY ELSIE BARTON

of equal parts of tomato soup and consomme and calls for a dash or two of sherry as the final sophisticated addition.

And a Dandelion Cream Soup is added just to beguile you into thoughts of spring. But it's a grand soup, too, abounding with vitamins. Melt 4 tablespoons of butter, add 3 tablespoons of flour and stir to a smooth paste. Then add a cup of finely chopped uncooked dandelion greens, 3 shoots of minced

chives, a minced clove of garlic, salt and pepper to taste. Saute two minutes, then gradually add four cups of milk, stirring over a low heat until blended and slightly thickened. Simmer 5 minutes, then serve.

SPECIAL DINNER PARTY SOUPS

These take on a Continental flavor and high-light your special dinner functions. A first course that starts table talk can practically insure the success of a dinner party, too. We'll give you some highly unusual 'round-the-world soups, each one of them different—and all of them easy.

From Switzerland, a Gruyere Soup. You add to clear consomme a small onion and simmer ten minutes. Put small cubes of crustless bread in a soup tureen and dredge each one with grated Gruyere cheese. Repeat, filling up the tureen in this fashion—or settle for two layers, if you'd rather. Pour a cup of light cream over all and put the tureen in a warm place until the bread has absorbed all the cream. Then add the hot consomme and serve immediately. It's very unusual!

From Belgium, a Garlic Soup, believe it or not. It is reliably stated that no unpleasant odor clings to the breath. Boil together 6 cups of water, a dozen buds of garlic, ½ teaspoon of salt and a sprinkling of pepper. When the garlic becomes soft, put all through a fine sieve. Beat 6 eggs well, add a little of the hot purée, and continue to beat. Add the egg mixture to the remaining soup and reheat, stirring constantly. Don't let it boil, or it will curdle. Add a tablespoon of toasted (Continued on page 81)

FOR BETTER SOUPS

1. Canned soups, either the condensed or the ready-to-eat variety, are vastly improved, you'll find, by the addition of 1 or 2 tablespoons of cream and a little butter.
2. A soup somewhat wanting in flavor can be strengthened and heartened if you'll add 1 or 2 egg yolks to it, with a little salt to taste.
3. When you're making a meat soup, don't add any soup greens until the soup is half done. And add the spices and seasonings when the soup is almost done.
4. Don't forget thyme and a bay leaf in your next Clam Chowder. They're as necessary to the chowder as the clams are! And sometime try a dash of caraway seeds in it.
5. Flavor the soup stock with dried dill instead of parsley for a bright, new flavor.
6. Short-cut Onion Soup: Cook 3 cups thin onion slices in butter until tender and golden; add 2 cans condensed consomme. Sprinkle a thick round of toast with Parmesan cheese, run it under the broiler, sail it in the soup.



MOCKERY MARRIAGE

"No one will marry you now!" her mother taunted. Yet the next day Iris married three million dollars!

BOOK-LENGTH TRUE STORY

TODAY I stand condemned, but not in a court of law, unfortunately. That way you'd have a hearing and get it done with. This way there will be no hearing and no end to the punishment, no end to the verdict. They won't forget, any of them—my family, my friends, the man I love—and what of the man they say I killed?

I'm not blameless, but am I as guilty as they say? I don't know. But I'm going to tell the truth now—no excuses—just the way it happened. Perhaps it will clear my mind and enable me to see into the future, and perhaps it will help some other girl whose life is ruled by one desire—to "show" her family.

When I look back, my mind stops at one place—that morning after Mardi Gras, five years ago. The tolling of the bells at the cathedral across the square awakened me. For a long time I lay staring at the long French windows outlined in sunlight, and beyond them the iron grillwork of the balcony to which the bougainvillea clung.

It was a strange room to me. Why should I, Iris DuPrey, be waking here? Slowly my eyes closed. I didn't want to remember. I only wanted to drift in the deep golden fog of peace that enveloped me. Never in all my twenty years had I known anything like this sweet flow of contentment. (How many times since have I tried to recapture that moment!)

The curtain billowed in the soft breeze and the sunlight danced as if on water. My eyes blinked, widened to stare. It wasn't water. It was the jewel-studded jacket of my white evening dress—the dress a frosty

pile there on the floor just inside the balcony windows. Near it lay two satin slippers.

I remembered now, suddenly fully awake and aware, that Berk Regan was asleep beside me. The night flooded back over me in a mad rush of pictures, like a movie run too fast.

I recalled the whole crazy carnival week that ended at Mardi Gras. What a day that had been! The parade in the morning, the floats, the crowds, the parties afterwards—especially the party last night, that bubbled and spread and ran all over town from a beautiful home on St. Charles Street down here to the French Quarter. I started out with Chris Plante, whose name meant society in this social-conscious town, ending with Berk Regan, whose name meant a pushing, fighting nobody on his way up.

Berk Regan! Just remembering him gave me that plunging feeling. How could I have been so mad! Berk Regan of all people! Yet the very thought lay like a film of ice over a rushing river. The fear was on the surface, but beneath was a mad, triumphant current. I did love Berk—nothing could change that. I had love, the kind I'd dreamed of.

I lay there, smiling as I remembered the strange events of the previous evening. Chris Plante had started out with me; tall, blond, correct. Mum's smile was more fixed than usual as she said, "Don't have too much party. Remember, Mardi Gras is followed by a day of penance. Chris, I count on you to look after Iris."

Mum didn't trust me. She constantly reminded me I was like Aunt Vida, my father's sister, the reckless one in a parade



He held out his arms and we danced. My head began to spin a bit. "You like me," Berk said, and I laughed, "Modest, aren't you?"

of proper ancestors. She was the living skeleton in the closet.

There was that time at fifteen when I eloped from the academy with the gardener's son. I didn't love him. We'd never exchanged more than a frightened kiss, but anything seemed better than another summer with Mother and my sisters. She brought me back before the ceremony was performed or the marriage consummated, but it was to her one more proof of my likeness to Aunt Vida, one more cause for lasting distrust.

So she warned Chris before we started out. But the evening rolled along, and so did we. At midnight we arrived at Bill Slade's apartment in the French Quarter. I was high and gay, and Chris was getting drowsy.

There was a big crowd at Bill's, mostly the younger social set.

And then through the crowd I saw Berk Regan. As usual, he was alone. Tall, straight, tiger-smooth, with his green eyes and smile like flash lightning, he could always do things to me. Just meeting his eyes, I could feel that quick jolt deep down in me as if I'd taken a double Scotch straight.

He came toward me, patently conscious of his full-dress suit. He was too new at the social game to know Tuxedos were adequate for this sort of party. "Having fun?"

I nodded.

The radio was going full blast. He held out his arms and we danced. My head began to spin a bit.

Berk said, "You like me."

"Modest, aren't you?" I laughed to cover my embarrassment.



"Only honest. So why don't you give me a break? All winter I've been trying to get a date with you."

"Men wait in line for weeks," I teased.

"I've been waiting for months. Why the private brush-off? You don't snub me at parties."

"Have you really been crowding me?" I tried to tease, but my throat was dry. I daren't admit the truth. I was ashamed to take Berk Regan home, face Mum's contempt, Sibyl's fury, hear the rating Berk would draw from them. Climber, slum, they'd say.

All right, he was a lawyer. He was going places, but he'd come up the hard way, climbing up from the gutter. He'd been a roustabout, a professional boxer, a rigger in the oil fields. He talked hard and rough and noticeably different from all the men we

knew, the kind who'd married my sisters—in a word, gentlemen.

I needed only a second to know all that, but I needed a year to talk myself out of it with Berk Regan. Suddenly the mental strain was too much, or my drinks caught up with me.

"You better get Chris," I mumbled. "I've got to go home. Don't feel well."

Berk laughed. "Chris feels nothing at all. See!"

Chris had folded into a chair, sound asleep. "I'll take you home," Berk said.

Not Berk, with Mum certainly waiting for me! "No, let's take a walk," I said.

We walked across the square. The night was fragrant and softly warm. My head was clearing a little. Berk said, "Come up to my place. It's right here. I'll make you some coffee. You've had a hard day, baby."

We climbed the stairs of an old building to his apartment. He sat me in a deck chair on the balcony, took off my slippers, made me drink some fizzy stuff, and put a cold cloth on my head. Then he brought the coffee, strong and black.

Pretty soon I felt better. We sat there together and looked at the stars and listened to the distant sounds of the city. We talked a little but not too much. We didn't need to somehow. At last, for all my denial, we two were alone. A bell rang the hour—three o'clock. Over the city, other bells echoed softly.

"I'm better now," I said. "I must go."

I sat up, then remembered about my shoes. "This stone floor is cold," he said, and lifted me in his arms. I felt warm and sweetly alive. My arms were around his neck, his face close to mine, making his eyes strangely wide.

"I always knew it would be like this," he whispered, and I closed my eyes as he kissed me and carried me tenderly inside.

CHAPTER II

LYING IN BED the next morning, I remembered it all again, feeling deliciously alive. Then a hand closed under my heart. I opened my eyes quickly. Berk was on his elbow, his green eyes soft and kind. He looked strangely young with his hair on end and a slight shadow of beard on his lean jaw. I smiled and he kissed me.

After a long while, he said, "I always knew it would be like this."

"You said that before—last night," I murmured.

"It had to be that way, Iris," he said. "We belong to each other. Now you know it, too. It's in your eyes."

Berk went on, "There's only one answer for us. We'll get married today. You go home and get some clothes, and I'll come up and see your mother—or I'll meet you at City Hall, however you want it."

"We can't today," I said quickly. "Ash Wednesday is a holiday. City offices are closed."

"Then tomorrow."

Swiftly my arms tightened around him. "Kiss me, kiss me!" I whispered.

Fiercely, ardently, he obeyed, mistaking terror for passion. How could he know what it meant to me to go back to reality? But this time, I kept telling myself as I answered his kisses, this time it will be different. It must! I belonged to Berk. Nothing—not even Mum—could change this.

"I belong to Berk—belong!" I kept chanting the words as the cab rolled the few blocks to Esplanade, stopped before the red brick house, with its red brick wall and the garden door with the brass knocker. I went up the steps, my jewel-studded jacket sparkling in the noon sunlight.

Polly's large, dark figure loomed on the wide staircase as I entered the hall. "You sure give us a turn, Miss Iris. Where you been? I thought one of them clowns got you."

"I was done in, Polly. I spent what was left of the night at Muriel's apartment." Her apartment was in the same building as Berk's, and I'd left a note under her door to that effect. "Where's Mum?"

"Mis' DuPrey had a luncheon engagement, but she said to tell you sure that Miss Renée and Mr. Jerod, and his cousin, Mr. Marvin Courtney, is coming to dinner, and you got to be here."

"I'll be here all right," I said gaily, running to my room. It was good Mum was out. I could live alone a little longer with rapture, not have to face the inevitable showdown on last night. I could even face the prospect of a dinner with stodgy Marvin Courtney without a qualm.

What a hypocrite Mum was, I thought, as I pulled off my clothes, eased gratefully into a hot tub! How she would despise Berk because his family was unknown and any fortune he might have he had made himself. At the same time, she'd shut her eyes

to the pitiful weakness of poor Marvin Courtney, who would inherit three million, but never could have made a nickel for himself. Yet while I condemned her, I never realized what a coward I was.

But at that moment I felt strong and reassured. I was too absorbed in the present to think of the past and comprehend what it would do to my future.

There were three of us girls—Manuela's daughters, everyone always said, even when Papa was still living. Manuela's puppets. Sibyl, the eldest, was the counterpart of Mum, cold but beautiful. She married wealthy, bald, middle-aged Raoul Jardine, with his plantations and his fortune in sugar. Apparently cold as a marble saint, only the tortured look in her eyes betrayed her. But pride was her passion and her love.

Renée, the youngest, was tall, blond, and incredibly beautiful. Her marriage at eighteen to Jerod Courtney was the sensation of the previous season. Jerod had everything—twenty-six, Yale grad, six foot three, handsome as a tailor's ad, a junior partner in a big banking firm, and heir to a million. He was a husband out of a fairy tale.

Renée believed she and Jerod just met and fell in love. Mum knew she engineered it, as she had arranged Sibyl's marriage; planned and scraped and twisted the modest fortune that Papa had left to get the best for her daughters. Only me, the middle one, the unpredictable one, was she unable to manage—or could she?

I didn't realize then she was modeling me after the fear in her own heart; the dread that I, high-spirited, gay, passionate, would be like Aunt Vida, surrender to love and refuse to count the cost.

But I had surrendered to love and I saw no cost that morning, only sweet triumph. Tomorrow we would be married. I slid into pajamas, brushed my hair, pulled down the shades against the noonday sun and crawled into bed.

When I woke, Mum was standing at the foot of my bed. She was wearing a negligee and evidently had had her afternoon rest. Even in her late forties, Mum was handsome. Her figure was youthful; her white hair a startling contrast to her clear, beautiful skin. And always she smiled, until her mouth was fixed in deceptive upturned pleasantness. It added a deadly note to her measured tone.

"And where, young lady," she asked archly, "were you last night?"

I sat up in bed, fully awake, trembling. I repeated the story I'd told Polly about staying at Muriel's.

"And where was Chris? You left here with him."

I shrugged. "He passed out."

Her smile deepened. "The devotion of your swains is certainly touching."

"I found others," I retorted.

"Undoubtedly—and more to your taste than Christopher Plante or Marvin Courtney."

MY heart was racing. This was a build-up and I knew it. I'd been through scenes like this before. What could she know?

"You spent last night with some man," she accused.

"I was at Muriel's apartment. You can ask her."

"I don't have to. Did you ever see this?"

It was a folded dance program. I didn't need to read the message to know it said: "Muriel, pet, if Mum asks around, I slept here last night. Details later. Iris." The dance program was the only scrap of paper I'd had in my evening bag.

"When I telephoned this afternoon to find if you'd got home, Polly gave me your story, so I dropped in at Muriel's. She wasn't at home, but this was under the door. I pulled it out with a nail file. Now I would like some details."

"You'll never get them," I said.

"You used Mardi Gras as an excuse to throw yourself away." Her voice was low and tense with fury. "Perhaps some man you never saw before or will never see again—just like Vida."

"I didn't!" I cried, then stopped myself, sunk my teeth in my lip to stay my own anger. I mustn't give myself away, I mustn't expose Berk. I sprang up, paced the room. Mum's voice goaded me like a whiplash. "You're a disgrace to the name of DuPrey. You're bad, like your Aunt Vida."

"Is every woman bad who is human, natural," I cried, "if she doesn't want her marriage ready made, such as you handed to Sibyl and Renée?"

Mum's face was livid. "I'd like to see the marriage you'd make. No one will have you now—unless it's some scum of the gutter, somebody who has to marry you."

She swept from the room, leaving my head ringing with her

words, "Somebody who has to marry you." That's what she would think of Berk—and, in a way, it was true.

Suddenly the enormity of the whole thing burst over me as, with wide-eyed horror, I realized how Mum would see it. Intoxicated, I had gone to a strange man's apartment—and spent the night.

But Berk wasn't strange, I argued with myself. I'd known him a long time. Had I ever brought him home? Had I ever kissed him before? But it wasn't that way, I wanted to cry out. It wasn't! I loved him. We both knew that. He'd kept saying, "I always knew it would be like this."

I could hear Mum's retort to that, too. "Knew you were easy—" I could anticipate her cruel words, but I couldn't stop them, and always I seemed to do the very thing that would bring her wrath down on me. Or did she drive me to it?

I leaped guiltily at the rap on the door. It was Polly. "I didn't know you were awake yet, Miss Iris. Dinner's at seven, and it's past six. Do you want something pressed? They're dressing."

"My blue is all right," I said flatly. "Thanks."

DRESSING—of course, with Renée and Jerod and poor stupid Marvin—millionaires, gentlemen—dress for dinner. Berk probably never dressed for dinner. He just ate. Nobody could know the torture of my mind in that hour.

The terrible truth was that while I loved Berk, I was ashamed of him. I wasn't brave enough to stand up to my family and say, "This is my man." Tangled with it was the sudden guilt at what I'd done. It had seemed so unquestionable that it was right. We belonged together. That was all.

Now I saw myself as a mad, wayward girl, throwing herself on a stranger, surrendering like any little cheap baggage. Perhaps Berk didn't mean it when he said he wanted to marry me. What if Mum were right? What if nobody would marry me?

CHAPTER III

AT SEVEN, WHEN I came downstairs, my smile was as fixed as Mum's. My heart an icicle in my breast. Renée, who is gorgeous in a cool, poised kind of way, had just arrived. She kissed my cheek.

"How well you look. Doesn't she, Jerod?"

Her soft blue eyes danced adoringly at her husband. Husband! Well, except for the ring, Berk was my husband. All the soft secrecy that had wrapped Renée since her marriage was mine, too. I knew about love. I stared at them. Did they—could they—know love like ours? Jerod's clipped, cultured voice startled me.

"I say, Iris. I've never seen you look better. Carnival must agree with you."

My cheeks flamed, but before I had to answer, Jerod had turned. "You remember Marvin?"

"Yes, of course. How are you?" I managed.

I hadn't even noticed him. Marvin Courtney was like that, a plump, soft man in his late twenties. He came forward, gave my hand a damp shake.

Jerod's cousin from Atlanta, he was going to inherit three million dollars. It seemed an awful waste of money.

Polly served cocktails, sherry for Mum, and then dinner. All through that meal my thoughts ran rampant. I was trying to fit Berk into this setting. Berk with his strident voice, his trick of saying "okay" and "what goes?" and the restless gestures of a man who worked with his hands.

Mum wouldn't object. She'd glory in it. It was what she expected me to do—to make any impossible marriage, so she could sit on the side lines and pick it apart, destroy me and him.

Why didn't I tell them then, defy them? But nothing would ever be defiance or freedom or success to me while the family could laugh at me.

At last that intolerable dinner ended and we returned to the living room. Marvin, who hadn't said two dozen words, settled in a big chair and promptly went to sleep. Mum suggested bridge. She enjoyed a good game, and Jerod was a better than average player.

She was arranging the table when Chris Plante arrived. Good looking in a high-bred, thin sort of way, he wore an embarrassed smile.

"I owe you an apology, Mrs. DuPrey," he said to Mother. "I rather lost Iris last night—rather lost myself, for that matter."

The others laughed, and Marvin woke up, blinked brightly as if he'd been awake all the time. And that, I thought contemptuously, would inherit three million dollars!

Chris was chatting on. "I woke up on the porch of the country club. The last thing I remember about you, Iris—practically the

last thing I remember—was at Bill Slade's on Royale Street. You were dancing with Berk Regan."

The name seemed to be in lights, dancing there in the room.

Jerod, shuffling the cards, said, "Berk Regan? Isn't he the chap the Bar Association tried to block last year? First man who has come up for a bar examination without a college degree in years. No excuse for that sort of thing now." Even then I knew Jerod didn't mean to be as much a snob as he sounded.

"That's the chap all right," Chris said. "He got by then, and I think he always will. Thick-skinned and tough, but I like him."

"Just who is this man—that Iris was dancing with?" Mum asked.

"Nobody, really," Chris said, and only I understood Mum's low cough.

Nobody, only the man to whom I belonged, the man I'd promised to marry—had to marry!

Chris's soft voice drawled on, "One of those people who come up from nothing with ideas and terrific energy. Lord, makes me tired to think how that boy works. He's got a little law office here. No good firm would take him in. Besides that, he's drilling for oil down in LaFouche Parish somewhere—one of those new developments. That was one of his jobs when he was studying law."

"How did he ever get to Bill Slade's?" Renée asked.

"Bill invited him right enough. But you know Bill, living down there in the French Quarter, rather Bohemian in his tastes. He even tried to put Berk up for the country club, but of course the membership committee turned him down."

I curled deeper into the chair, my throat aching. It was worse than I'd thought. I didn't look at Mum. I didn't have to. I knew the deep satisfied smile she'd wear. She'd never drop this now. She'd find out.

Suddenly I couldn't endure it any longer. I sprang up. "We were just going to play bridge. Wouldn't you like to take my hand, Chris? You're such a good player. I'm sure Renée would be pleased for a better partner."

"For one rubber," he agreed, his eye on the brandy bottle on the table. I brought him a drink. He looked as if he needed it. Funny how it was all right for Christopher Plante to have a hangover. He was in—he'd been born right. If Berk had one, it would be due to his gutter background.

The game began. I lit a cigarette, drifted out to the garden. It was beautiful and still and warm for early March. The traffic on Esplanade was a hum beyond the garden wall. I closed my eyes, leaned against the post of the gallery. I was so frightened, so bewildered. If only there were one person I could trust to help me fight this battle that was before me, around me.

"Iris!"

I started, and gave a half guilty laugh at the sight of Marvin Courtney. As usual, I'd forgot he was there. Apparently there was no escape that night. I let him lead me to the bench near the wall.

"You're awfully clever, Iris," he said, "getting the others to play bridge like this. I'm stupid about cards."

I MERELY nodded. Why say what I thought? "You were so nice to me at the wedding, too."

That got a rise. "Nice to you?" I'd ignored him.

"Yes, you were. I mean—well, you know I'm not very popular with girls. I'm shy. I never feel right with them." He was trying so hard to explain, I felt sorry for him.

"Why shouldn't they like you?" I asked. "You're rather good looking."

He really was when you remembered to look at him, sort of a round face and large dark eyes, good features, but no expression—"That's what I mean," he said gratefully. "You talk to me as you would to any fellow. You say, 'Rather good looking,' not 'so handsome,' when I know it's not true. They're just thinking of my money. If I could find a girl like you, Iris. Why, I haven't thought of anything but you since the wedding."

"But that was last June!" I gasped. "This is March. You never wrote—"

"How could I? It seemed silly. I've done foolish things before and been laughed at. I thought you were probably engaged, but Renée says you're not. That's the first thing I asked when I got here. Then tonight when you gave me this chance—"

"Marvin, what are you trying to say?"

"Will you marry me? I know you don't love me. I don't expect that, but you might learn, and I could give you everything—everything."

My first desire was to laugh. Then all the anger and confusion and dread of the past hours rose in one white-hot flame, searing on my mind Mum's fierce charge, "No one will marry you."

Here was someone who would—someone with three million

dollars! I'd prove to her I wasn't like Aunt Vida. I'd prove to her I could do as well as my sisters and better. I think out of the desperation of those previous hours I went a little mad. For a moment I'd forgotten Berk and love—forgotten my own heart. I saw escape, triumph, and half a solution.

Desperately my fingers closed over Marvin's soft, thick arm. "Marvin," I whispered, "could we tell them tonight?"

CHAPTER IV

"THIS IS IT! This is it!" I kept repeating again and again even through my restless sleep that night. This was the only way it could work. Berk was a dream—a dream that couldn't come true. I must have been mad.

The phone was ringing. I heard it groggily. It had been so late when I went to bed and so long before I could sleep. I blinked at the bedside clock. I'd slept through lunch.

Then Polly's voice on the hall extension came to me sharply: "Miss Iris not awake . . . I can't disturb her, sir. Mr. who? Mr. Regan?"

I was out of bed, not bothering with slippers or robe, dashed into the hall and snatched the phone. "Here I am," I gasped into the receiver.

"Iris, what the hell's up? Have you seen the papers—the noon edition?"

"I just awoke."

"They say you're engaged, engaged to Marvin Courtney."

"Yes." My voice was flat and strange.

"What do you mean—yes? You can't be. I've got to see you, Iris—right now."

"No—it's better this way, Berk. There's no explaining."

"You're god damn wrong. There's plenty of explaining. I'll be there in ten minutes."

Downstairs I could hear Mum's voice, clear and bright. "No, no!" I gasped. "I'll be there—at your place—at six."

"Make it three. I can't work. If you're not here on the dot, I'm coming up."

Mum's voice carried clearly now. "Take a breakfast tray to Miss Iris, Polly. And tell her I've made an appointment for showings at Gaudschaux's at four. I hear they have some smart new things. I'll meet her there. I'm going to the hairdresser."

Her voice faded as I reached my room again, closed the door. How was I going to face him? What was I going to say?

The bell at the cathedral rang three as I stepped out of the cab before his door. Nervously I glanced up at the old building with its beautiful wrought-iron balcony, hung with the bougainvillea I remembered seeing from within the room.

The stairway was steep and dark. The steps creaked beneath my uncertain tread. Then the door on the third landing opened and Berk was there, the lean, hard straightness of his body outlined in light.

He seemed taller, bigger than I remembered. My smile wavered as I went past him into the small living room that looked out on the enclosed garden. The next room faced the street—the bedroom.

I slid off my furs, though actually I was cold. Berk didn't speak, only closed the door and walked toward me. The early afternoon paper lay crumpled on a chair.

"Now," he said, "let's have the straight of this."

"You apparently know it already," I said. "I'm engaged to marry Marvin Courtney."

He only took one step closer, his hands were deep in his trouser pockets, his voice tight as a drawn string. After one quick glance, I kept my eyes lowered.

"Look, baby, you don't seem to have the straight of it. You can't go out and marry some other guy—not after the other night. You're mine."

"We had both been drinking—we scarcely knew each other—" Every word hurt to say.

Berk's hand clamped my shoulder roughly, made me throw my head back.

"Cut that stuff! We've known each other from 'way back. It's deep down. All right, I know what your family's got—maybe not much dough, but the kind of social setup this town goes for. Your sister is Mrs. Jerod Courtney—big time. Okay, let's admit that you're coming down if you marry me—but not far, baby."

My head sank forward again of its own weight. I couldn't stand the intensity of his eyes, the fierce drive of his voice.

"I've got a well coming in any day now, and then I'll be in Courtney's class. Get me? Dirty rich!"

His hand seemed to be burning into my shoulder as his words



burned into my mind. I couldn't bear it. With a cry I wrenched away from him.

"Don't you see, money isn't everything? You'd never be in Courtney's class—never!"

His face was deadly gray. "I don't believe it, even when you say it—not after the other night. You're no charity butterfly, playing the field. Love was new to you—and that kind was new to me. You can't be running out on me."

"It's not that!" I cried desperately. "Our love would destroy us both. You must let me go! I can't see you again. My family—my mother—the Courtneys—" I was babbling.

Berk blocked my way, his long arms swinging at his sides, his green eyes narrowed. "So it was a game—a part of Mardi Gras, and now you're through? Marrying a fathead like Marvin Courtney for his dough. Well, try and forget this—and this!"

The cry that rose in my throat was smothered by his brutal kisses as he crushed me to him.

Here was no gentle lover, but a man gone mad—mad. At first I fought with all the strength I possessed, and then my own strength turned traitor. I was blazing with the fire I tried to fight, answering again those fierce kisses. This was my love! This was my life! Hungrily I returned his mad kisses.

Suddenly Berk flung me away from him, sent me spinning into a chair. "So you're the girl who is going to marry Marvin Courtney! All I can say is, 'God help you both.'"

"Berk! Berk!" I cried, rising and trying to hold him back as he made for the door. But he shook me off furiously, and then I heard his long stride taking the stairs two at a time.

He couldn't leave me like this! He couldn't mean it! It was a minute before I could go out on the balcony. There was no sign of him in the street below, but farther down a car was pulling away from the curb. His car? I didn't know what kind he had.

I ran back to the apartment and grabbed the phone, called his office. A girl's voice answered, "Mr. Regan? He's gone for the day."

"But I must reach him! It's terribly important."

"You might try his apartment. He was going there first. Then he's going down to the oil fields near La Fouché. He won't be back for two weeks."

I hung up the receiver, and cradling my head on my arms, I wept.

LOOKING back now, I wonder how I went through that afternoon. Things stand out sharp and disconnected—a small, bright blue hat and Mum saying it did things for me—the kindest things she'd ever said to me, but it was under the influence of the Courtney millions.

Then there was the silver fox jacket. They were just coming in then. Normally I'd never forget the sheer excitement of merely looking at anything so luxurious. I only remember how soft and warm it felt, reminding me of pillows, a desire to sleep, escape.

Finally we were through. Mum had a meeting at five. She's like that, goes on endlessly with committees and things. I crept into a cab and went home. There were several boxes in the hall and heaps of letters and telegrams. The news was getting around. From the back of the hall, I heard Polly talking on the phone.

"She's not to home now, Mis' Carter. I'll certainly tell her, ma'am."

I tiptoed upstairs. If they didn't know I was home, they'd let me alone. That was all I wanted now, to be alone and perhaps to cry, to empty this terrible, tight feeling in my heart.

I opened the bedroom door, stopped dead. Renée was sitting by the window. Her hat and fur scarf were lying on the bed. The sun made a halo over her bright hair, but her lovely madonna-like face looked unhappy.

"This is a surprise," I said, closing the door. She came so seldom since her marriage, was like a stranger in the house.

"I wanted to talk to you, Iris," she said earnestly. Then when I didn't move, because I couldn't, she came to me, took off my hat and top coat, led me to the deep chair at the opposite window, and put a stool under my feet. "You're done in."

"I suppose I still have a hangover from the carnival." Then, my voice under control, I added pointedly, "I came home to take a nap."

"You can sleep when I'm through." She sat on the footstool, facing me, her hands clasped on her knees. "Iris, why are you marrying Marvin?"

"Why do people usually marry?" I parried almost defiantly.

"For love. I do love Jerod. It was marvelous that he was wealthy, but it was only accidental."

I laughed. "Some people have the nicest accidents."

Her fair skin flushed. "It is true, though," she insisted, "no matter how it looks to you. You think Mum forced me into it. She only helped by giving me everything to—to make it look as if we were nearly equals—financially, that is."

"Oh, Iris, honey, please listen to me. You don't know what you're doing. Go away. Go to New York. Sibyl would love to have you."

"Sure, run away and give Mum the last laugh."

"That's why you're doing this!" Renée cried. "It's out of hate, and you can't marry that way. Especially Marvin. He's no husband for you."

"What's the matter?" The old tightness was back. "Don't you want me in the family? Too much to have me for a cousin-in-law?"

"Don't talk like that. It's you I'm thinking of, and what marriage would be like with Marvin. I don't really know, of course, but I can imagine." She leaned forward, her voice low and ardent. "You don't know how wonderful love can be, Iris."

MY WORDLESS cry was a thing of tortured pain. I didn't know about love! Maybe it wasn't love, but whatever it was, it was all of me crying out in that moment for Berk—Berk to come back—no one else ever. I pushed Renée aside and jumped up. She misunderstood.

"Don't be angry, Iris. I'm only thinking of your good and Marvin's."

"Sure, I thought that would come out." I was striking out of hate and fury to hide my own torture.

"It's not the way you think, but you must see he's—well, he's always been rather weak, not very masculine. His parents died when he was a baby. The old aunt who raised him doesn't seem to notice. Jerod's father hoped he'd marry some older woman who would at least pity him. But you'd have no pity. You'd hate him. You're young and fiery and it would destroy you both."

"I don't hear any objection from Mum," I said, braced against the vanity as though I were battling—and I was, fighting myself and all the hates of a lifetime.

Renée came toward me, her hand outstretched. "Please listen to me, Iris, before it's too late. You don't believe me. You've fought Mum so long that you don't trust anyone."

Tears were in her eyes. I turned away, I couldn't look at her. I dared not weaken.

"I know what I'm doing," I said defiantly.

"You can't know what marriage means, what it might be like with Marvin. No millions are worth it." Renée was in tears.

"Go away!" I screamed. "Go away and let me alone!"

And then my tears broke—the last I was to shed for many years, perhaps because there were no more after that long hour of hysteria. Polly and Renée worked over me. I knew that vaguely. Finally I slept.

When I woke it was morning, Friday morning. A church bell was chiming for eight-o'clock mass. Was it only two days before I'd wakened to that other bell? It seemed very far away. I felt cool and strong and very sure of myself now. I got up, took a shower and dressed. I was at breakfast, with Polly eyeing me nervously, when Marvin telephoned.

"Are you sure you're all right, Iris?" he kept asking in that soft, uncertain voice. "I called last night. Did you get my roses?"

The house was full of them. "Yes, thank you," I murmured. "And I'm fine, really."

"What I wanted—I mean—would it be all right—I'd like to pick out a ring this morning."

"Come for me in an hour," I said. Why couldn't he say what he wanted and get it over? I hung up while he was still telling me how grateful he was.

In half an hour he was there. Driving downtown, Marvin kept beaming at me, nervously, as if he half expected me to disappear.

We had to park a block from the small, exclusive jewelry shop in St. Charles Street. He cut the motor and sat back of the wheel, talking on endlessly about his family and the wedding.

I interrupted, "Mum is quite set on a big church wedding immediately after Lent, the kind Renée and Jerod had."

Marvin nodded, started to speak, but I beat him to it. "Do you really want a big wedding like that?"

He blinked at me and concluded the fastest thinking he'd ever done. "Don't you?" he asked almost eagerly, grabbing my hand.

"No," I said. "What I'd really like is for us to get married this morning."

"Then, why don't we? Of course, there's the family." He was blinking and beaming, struggling with the changes such a thought implied. It was too much for him.

"Let's just buy a wedding ring," I said, "and get going."

"Oh, Iris, you're wonderful!"

CHAPTER V

DID YOU EVER have three million dollars? Or the income from it? Neither had I. Well, it's a great deal of money, and you can have anything and everything—things you never even knew about.

Then, along with the money, you get a lot of things that belong to the family—jewels and maybe, as I did, a place at Palm Beach, a "cottage" at beautiful Sea Island, Georgia, and some farms, and a yacht. Lawyers were always popping up with more papers for me to sign, because Marvin insisted everything be held jointly.

Then you also get the family. Ours was the Georgia branch of the Courtneys. They were old and stuffy. Jerod, it seemed, was really a second cousin, which was one reason he didn't get as much of the Courtney money as Marvin. But there had also been some good blood introduced into his branch, and so there was a lot more vigor.

Lot more! What a beautiful understatement! Those Atlanta Courtneys were done, through, worn out! Small, frozen, polite little people sipping tea and counting their money, which would all go to Marvin and then to institutions—because Marvin would have no children.

I knew it that first ghastly night in the hotel with Marvin maudlin drunk sobbing against my breast, while all of me recoiled in horror from him. From the moment of our marriage, he started to drink and kept it up all that day while I drove. I could tell he was afraid. Then that night I knew why, as Jerod and Renée had known, or suspected.

"You don't know what it would mean—" she'd said. How would she feel if she'd had to leave Jerod the second night of their love for this? Legal or not, Berk's love was mine, and I'd betrayed it. That was double torture with Marvin clinging to me, sobbing. "Don't tell on me. Help me!" As if one could!

The next morning he didn't remember. He had a bad headache and there was fear in his eyes. If only I could have forgotten! His questions foundered, he stammered worse than ever.

"You're staying?" he whispered. "You aren't leaving me?"

"I won't leave you," I promised, bound not by love but by pride and the Courtney millions.

"Besides," I lied to him, "you don't *really* remember last night."

His round eyes blinked hopefully, snatching at the thought there might be something to remember. How I was to be repaid for that one kind lie!

Certainly there was nothing to remember in the remainder of that week but nightmare. Then the honeymoon trip—what a bitter farce!—was ended and we were in Atlanta. That was when the money and the gifts flowed in. This was my compensation, I kept telling myself—this was the price.

And then my heart would scream out, "Berk, Berk! Come back to me!" In the night I'd cry out for him. In the morning I shut it away and counted the toll.

My car, my silver, my servants. My family and all the old ladies fluttering over me; old maids who thought their nephew a dear, sweet boy; gouty old bachelors who looked at me questioningly from eyes framed in purple puffs. They had suspicions. They'd known vigor in their day, but with the underlying weakness in families that don't marry. It's not right; it's not healthy.

The younger set received me warmly, if a bit puzzled. Socially it was such a "right" marriage. A DuPrey of New Orleans, good education, good family, and Marvin was rich if not overintelligent. Oh, yes, it looked right as rain on the surface.

We went everywhere, and there was no question of Marvin's devotion. But he drank heavily and steadily, because he believed when he was drunk he was different. Soon, I kept thinking, I'd have to tell him. I couldn't endure it.

I'd talk to myself out loud with the bedroom door locked, while I paced the floor, every nerve aching. "You've got to pull yourself together. This won't last long. He can't endure it either. By and by you can have separate rooms. He'll forget. He can't bear the shame. Then you can have the money, the name, and triumph over Mum with your social position in New Orleans, in the entire south, as Mrs. Marvin Courtney. Society doesn't ask how he makes love. They only know it's a distinguished and wealthy family. It

won't be long—you've got to endure things a little bit longer."

Then there was the day I read in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, "New Orleans lawyer brings in gusher. New well a bonanza. Berkley Regan, 28, a lawyer with offices on Canal Street, is the owner of the new Lucky Day well that came in yesterday. Regan, who at one time worked in oil fields in Texas and Mexico, has been foreman of his own drilling crew—"

"Any day now I'll be dirty rich," he'd said and it was true—true of both of us. Suddenly an old expression had a new meaning—filthy rich—but my wealth had a different kind of soil than his.

I played eighteen holes of golf that afternoon. I had to do something to work Berk out of my system. I could call him, I was thinking. I had an excuse—congratulations. I could almost imagine the conversation, if he'd talk to me.

"We'll be back in New Orleans soon," I'd say. "You must come see us." What I'd really mean was, "Come see me—come back to me." An invitation to love—

That's why I jumped in the car and drove out to the club. The pro said my drive had improved tremendously. What did he know of the power behind it?

I was beastly tired that night. Marvin and I went to a dinner, given in our honor. I smiled until my face ached, as I thought Mum's face must feel at times with that perpetual, meaningless smile. Home at midnight, I fell into bed and slept instantly—and for twelve hours. Next day I was just as tired and faced with dread a long round of social activity.

It was almost as if I were drugged. I wanted only to shut my eyes and sleep. I became afraid. Perhaps it was some kind of escape, a condition I was working myself into because of Marvin. He was so kind and thoughtful now, so thankful that I made no demands for love. I could see how people got into a state of invalidism; anything in preference to what had gone before.

But after a week, I went to the doctor. I was taut with dread of what he might ask of my life with Marvin. It's hard to lie to a doctor. Dr. Smythe looked even keener than average. I sat with my head high, my smile fixed when he said, "How long have you been married, Mrs. Courtney?"

"A little over a month," I replied defensively.

"It is rather soon to speak positively without special tests, but there is every indication of pregnancy."

"A baby?" I gasped.

He laughed. "Of course, and very nice indeed. I'm most happy for you both."

A baby—Berk Regan's baby! I walked out of the office in a fog. Marvin was waiting in the car. The chauffeur held open the door.

"Are you all right? What did he say?" I looked for a moment at that round, earnest face, and then I remembered that lie, that blessed lie. I sat close to him, took his hand, whispered, "Remember the first night? No, you don't. Well, the doctor thinks we—we're going to have a baby."

"Oh, Iris!" he breathed, and if a man could have died of happiness, I'd have been a widow then.

The car had started. The pleasant Atlanta streets passed in a blur. I sat rigid against the deep upholstery, my heart hammering until it seemed to thunder in my ears. What had I done?

I glanced quickly at Marvin. He sat back, his whole frame spread with the new confidence. He believed it. He wanted to believe, and why shouldn't he? No one would ever know but me. As for Berk, I'd put him out of my mind. It had to be—it had to be.

MARVIN COURTNEY'S child! For days and weeks I kept repeating it to myself, building up my own confidence and the dark wall around the secret in my heart. It was my secret, a dark, bitter one, and no one must ever suspect.

Certainly not Marvin's family—these chattering, fussy, drained old people who had raised him, made him this bulky shadow of a man. I didn't see it then, but like myself he was a slave of the spirit, too. While I had fought Mum and built a resistance in hate, he had weakened, physically and mentally.

Now they tried to capture me, smother me with devotion and fears, all so avidly anxious for this new Courtney. I couldn't stand them. I knew if we remained in Atlanta, there would be a quarrel. I wanted none of that. Besides, I was reasonably sure Mum was already expecting some such complication.

The weather was my ally. Summer heat descended on Atlanta in mid-May, and I had no trouble persuading Marvin to go to Sea Island. I think those two months were the nearest we came to happiness.

Marvin was so kind in those months when we were alone. No

longer required to be a lover—doctor's orders, I assured him—he was thoughtful, attentive, and pitifully eager to please.

Then suddenly I was seized by a driving desire to go back to New Orleans.

What was my triumph without an audience? Hate, warping and twisting, like a deadly disease, drove me back. I wanted Mum to see the power of my wealth, the success of this marriage that I presented to the public carefully as a staged play.

That there was another reason I didn't admit, a terrible longing that I fought every waking moment. If I went back to New Orleans, saw Berk again, heard of him, I could conquer this, forget it. Once that was over, forgotten, I'd manage the rest.

So I wrote Renée, who was spending the summer at Pass Christian. I hinted that Marvin had changed so much, he'd like a job, any kind of job, but of course he mustn't know I suggested it. If it came from Jerod, his own cousin—

Not a week later, Jerod wrote him, asked if he'd like to take a position in the banking firm. "Now that you're married, thought you might like to bring another Courtney into the banking house—"

Marvin was pitifully pleased, read the letter again and again.

"See what you've done for me, Iris. Jerod never would have done this before we were married. He—he doesn't really think I'm very bright."

"Are you going to take it?" I asked abruptly.

"Am I? I should say—that is, if you don't mind living in New Orleans again. Aunt Harriet and the others will be pleased."

So will I, I thought, to get me and my baby away from those old people, back to my own town, back to—right there my thoughts stopped. I should have said back to my own people—but I had no one to go to, no one whom I trusted, no one who had ever really loved me. Perhaps Renée loved me, but Mum had planted so much distrust between us and I had deepened it by the secrets I had to guard so well, the lie I had to live. No, there was no love to take me back, only a bitter triumph of hate.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE FALL we returned to New Orleans, bought a lovely old house and I furnished it exquisitely. Marvin was so happy, so generous, so proud of everything I did. Often I caught Jerod watching him curiously. Renée, who was expecting her first baby, told me a hundred times how happy they were for us.

"I never thought it would work. You've done miracles for Marvin, and you are happy, aren't you, Iris?"

"Why shouldn't I be? I have everything." Everything including power over Mum, the chance to taunt her—I, the girl who would never marry, and now never gave her a chance to forget it. I knew the double edge to that satisfaction, the danger that my marriage might not last. But I was fiercely confident that Marvin would never break it. How terribly right I was!

On Christmas Eve my son was born. I came drowsily out of the anesthesia as the bells rang midnight. So many bells, I thought, New Orleans and all its church bells. I felt warm and deeply happy, the bells confused in my memory. Where was I, and why? My hand moved out along the neatly folded cover, dropped abruptly into space from the narrow hospital bed. My heavy lids lifted.

"Mardi Gras," I whispered. "Berk—"

A nurse emerged from the shadows. "How do you feel, Mrs. Courtney? You have a fine little boy."

Mrs. Courtney—of course! Christmas! The starched uniform swished out, returned with a bundle. "Your Christmas present," she said, and made a nest of my arms, laid the bundle in it, turned back the edge of a pink blanket.

"He's a very long baby," she said, "He's going to be a big fellow."

I was staring at him, the tiny face, the mouth like a button hole, the incredibly exquisite hands. My son and Berk's. It was as if I hadn't really understood until that moment what I had done.

He was Berk's son. I thought anyone could see it in the shape of his face, the longness of him. I wanted to cry out to that smiling, starched nurse. My throat seemed to swell. I couldn't speak, but the cry must have been in my eyes. The nurse looked quickly at the baby.

At that moment the door opened and Mum came in. Behind her, beaming, was Marvin. Their coming was like the closing of a prison door, and I saw then that I had built it for myself.

We named him David for the great-grandfather who had founded the Courtney fortune. Now he would inherit all the money; not only what belonged to Marvin, but to all those old aunts and uncles, who showered him now with everything from stocks and bonds to booties.

"Your father should know," I'd whisper to him when we were

alone and I cuddled him in my arms. "Your father who was a street urchin—"

Then suddenly I couldn't see David for tears. Berk wasn't a street urchin now. He was a rich man, and I'd betrayed him, stolen his son, lied to his heart and mine.

Once I looked him up in the phone book. He still had the office on Canal Street, the apartment on Royale. Was he married? What would he say if I called?

But I couldn't, of course. That was all in the past. I had to live for the present and the future, the beautiful gilded future of Mrs. Marvin Courtney and son.

When David was two weeks old, we came home to the beautiful house on St. Charles Street. An overawing French nurse had been added to the staff of five servants, and one wing of the house was redecorated for the newcomer. I had selected the things before I went to the hospital, but Renée and Mum had superintended the finishing.

"It's beautiful!" I gasped.

Mum, beside me, her tight smile ever present, said, "We thought it was very lovely, and yet durable—in case you have any more children."

I started, glanced at her quickly, but she had turned, walked down the hall. Trembling, I went to my room. There another surprise awaited me, a mink coat. Marvin came in from his room, helped me try it on.

"It was made for you," he said, "in more ways than one."

I turned before the long mirror and felt that lift of triumph I needed so badly. It was made for me, and I was beautiful. Motherhood had done that. I was beautiful and rich. What more could a girl ask?

With leisure and luxury, I recovered quickly and looked three times as lovely.

January gone, Mardi Gras came in a few weeks. Marvin suggested a trip to New York and a new wardrobe for carnival.

"How marvelous!" I said. "I can have all the clothes I want."

Marvin nodded happily, his round face always reminding me of a lantern in a breeze. "I thought it would be nice if we got a fox jacket for your mother while we were there. She admires them so, and she's done so much for us. I feel in a way I have her to thank for this marriage."

"In a way you do," I said softly, "and nothing would please me more than to give Mum a fox jacket."

Then suddenly I felt one of those awful heart-churning pangs that had come ever since I first laid eyes on David. I looked up quickly at Marvin.

"You've been so sweet, so generous—"

"I can't give you enough, after the baby and everything. Besides," his hand moved uncertainly over my shoulder, "this will be our second honeymoon."

I turned away quickly, sickened by the sudden jolt of fear at the hope in his eyes. I couldn't live again that first terrible month of our "honeymoon" with Marvin's drinking and love-making. It was too high a price for pride—even too high for millions. And what about David? Out of my jumbled thoughts I knew darkly it would hurt him.

WE were going to the country club to a dance that night—my first since we'd been members, what with the baby's coming. My thoughts were miles from myself as I dressed, but Marvin told me a dozen times as we drove out to the club how beautiful I looked.

There was a big crowd at the club, and everyone made a great fuss over me. Their compliments sounded empty, or was it only the echo in my own heart? I couldn't go on with this life. It was too much of a masquerade. Marvin was living in a fool's paradise, but that's where his aunts had kept him. I couldn't go on—I couldn't!

I managed to get away, drifted down the corridor toward the card room. It was quiet there, and the music from the ballroom came distantly soft. From the game room came the whir of the wheels, the low voice of the croupier. Red, black, win and lose—it was the pattern of my life, everything depending on the spin of a wheel.

I stopped abruptly, my heart catching high and tight in my breast. A tall, lean figure had swung out of the card room. I was face to face with Berk Regan.

The blood drained away, leaving his face ashen. Even his lips were colorless. He was immaculate in evening clothes. The well-tailored black accented the lean, hard straightness of him, his palor.

My heart had started again, double quick, and my voice was low and uncertain, as I faltered, "This is a surprise. How are you?"

"Didn't expect to meet me here?" His green eyes were narrowed, until they gleamed like lights from under a door. "Few clubs today argue with my kind of money."

"Oh, yes—the oil well. I read about it. Congratulations."

"Thanks." It was cold and final, giving me no lead, no help to what I wanted to say, what I had to say now that I faced him. He moved slightly to one side, as though he would pass me there in the corridor.

"Berk, I want to talk to you." My throat was so dry I could scarcely form the words. "So much has happened."

"I read the papers, too. Congratulations!"

"You don't understand. There's something I've got to tell you—"

His smile was tight and unpleasant. "Sure, I know what you're going to say, baby. I got you all wrong. You're a lady, but I'm no gentleman. You couldn't expect me to understand."

"Please, Berk, you must listen! I need you."

He laughed. "I bet you do," he said sarcastically. Then suddenly, "Lay off that 'need you' stuff. We're through. I belong to this club because I like golf and a good night's session at the table, but I'll pick my women from my own class. I don't like the way 'ladies' play."

I was too hurt and bewildered to be angry. "Berk, it's a favor."

"I'd see you double damned before I'd do you a favor."

Another man was coming out of the card room. Berk bowed and passed me as though we hadn't met. For a moment I leaned against the wall, my knees wavering.

Then slowly anger came, steadying and invigorating as a cold shower. So that was how he felt! Double damned! Well, I was. No matter where I turned I saw an enemy. The only love I had in the world was for my baby. I stood embattled against all who should have been close to me—my mother, the father of my child. Only Marvin could I handle.

I drew myself up, walked slowly back to the ballroom, a smile on my lips. I could handle him, could mould him and my life to show those others.

CHAPTER VII

IT'S EASY TO SAY you're going to spend your life doing one certain thing, but you forget that life is made up of days, hours, minutes. Life is not a big picture, it's a lot of little threads.

You don't realize that at twenty-one, I didn't. When I walked away from Berk that night, life looked like one desolate corridor down which I must march proudly alone. How simple though lonely!

I didn't think of the nights with Marvin, the clashes with Mum and with Marvin's ancient aunts over David. I didn't realize how young twenty-one is, how urgent is nature, how turbulent one's heart.

Twenty-one, two, three, four. The swing of the years, so long in passing, so brief to look back on. New York, Palm Beach, Santa Barbara, the Laurentians for skiing, Sun Valley for more of the same, and in between times, New Orleans as long as I could endure it.

Of course there was David, but he didn't need me. He had a nurse and governess. Besides, a child's world is simple and uncomplicated, and there was no simplicity in me. After ten minutes with him, I was nervous, shaking. Was it because of the tall slenderness of him even at four? How could anyone look at him and not know to whom he belonged? Yet, even Mum kept saying he looked like her family.

I knew what she was thinking. Once she'd even said, "When you and Marvin break, I'm going to take David."

We weren't going to break, not if I could hold out. Marvin still adored me, drank himself into oblivion night after night, trying to recapture that first love—in which he so supremely believed.

Other men tried to make love to me, but I kept up the act as a devoted wife; society wife, to be sure, always explaining, "There are times when one must be separated, but tomorrow I'm flying home to be with him." How often had I said that while doubting, worldly-wise men stared at me, confused if not convinced.

It was a game I played with one counter for defense, my marriage. It worked until I got home and faced Marvin again. Then nature would revolt against this life. What was I waiting for? Glimpses of Berk only added to that torture, the tightening of nerves.

Gradually, like any gambler, I became bolder and more desperate. Men knew it quickly, and only the constant presence in our social set of Renée and Jerod saved me from some mad, scandal-making gesture.

Then last winter, Renée, expecting another baby, dropped out of the social whirl, and I met Pierre Carieux. A big, vigorous man with black curly hair and a loud laugh, he came from the

bayous of Louisiana. He'd been involved in some political scandals but got out somehow, and now had many wealthy connections in New Orleans.

In a dozen ways he reminded me of Berk, only not so honest. But he had the same breath-taking vigor, the strength, the fierce attraction that compelled me. He knew it. The first time we danced together at the club, he said, "You're nervous."

"Am I?" I asked.

"You tremble." His hand rested on my bare arm and I shivered. "You're not cold," he said slowly, "but I'd almost wager your heart is cold."

"Clever, aren't you, 'Dr.' Carieux?" I laughed, to cover my discomfort.

"I may be cleverer than you think—as a doctor."

NO matter where I went at the Christmas holidays, I met Pierre. It reminded me of that other season when I met Berk at every turn. And as with Berk, I could tell when Pierre was there. I could measure it later, too, by my increasing impatience with Marvin.

Then presently I couldn't get Pierre out of my mind. My thoughts ran daring and darting, playing with the idea that was clearly in back of his eyes—an affair. I began to "reason" as women who play at marriage always must.

After all, I couldn't go on like this. Already I looked ten years older than twenty-four. I'd be kinder to Marvin if I were happy, and he'd never know. As for Pierre, his little back-country wife was deeply religious, and he'd never break up his marriage. The old cake-and-penny-too theory. Danger—danger—expensive danger!

A week passed and I didn't see him. Then we met at one of the winter balls. He cut in on the first dance. "Have you missed me?" he asked. "I was out of town."

"Really? I hadn't noticed," I lied.

"I don't completely believe you, but you had to say it," he laughed, drawing me closer to him, until every breath hurt. He guided me through a door into a long, deserted passage.

"This," he whispered hoarsely, "is how I missed you."

His arms folded me tight to him, and his mouth covered mine. I hadn't been really kissed in five years, not since I'd left Berk's arms. I'd flirted a little. But this was like tearing the delicate wrappings of pretense and politeness away, leaving only stark desire. Against my will, my lips clung to his.

"I knew it," he said huskily. "You're starved for love."

I was frightened, at myself and at him. "This can't be, Pierre. We must go back. I can't see you again."

He laughed. "We need each other. Why try to pretend we don't? I know your husband. You've seen my wife. Nice, both of them—but not for us. We're strong. We can make our own rules."

I could only shake my head, try to turn from the strength of his arms, the ardent caresses of his hands, the terrible urgency of his words. I was so absorbed in my own conflict I didn't see the couple approaching, didn't hear the footsteps until Pierre himself turned quickly, dropped his hands too fast.

I looked too, then, and faced the contemptuous gaze of Berk Regan. Beside him was a rather lovely girl. With a bare nod to Pierre, he guided her past us, down the corridor to the ballroom.

"See that fellow?" Pierre asked. "Berk Regan. Struck oil a couple of years back. He came up the hard way like me. Now he's a big lawyer. Smart!"

I nodded. I was afraid to speak lest I get hysterical. Pierre's hand was on my arm. "Tomorrow for lunch—a little private room. I want to talk to you. I must, Iris. You'll see it my way."

We were back in the ballroom. A partner was claiming me for a dance. My eyes were searching for Berk; the proud head, the set of his shoulders, the lean grace of him when he danced. Then I saw him. Our eyes met, and his gaze moved impersonally, without recognition.

At the end of the dance, Marvin came up. "I been looking all over for you, Iris. Your sister, Sibyl, is here. She and her husband arrived this afternoon."

We joined Sibyl in a box. I hadn't seen her since my own wedding, and I really ran to her eagerly. Here was somebody who might understand. But the moment I saw her, I knew she wouldn't. Her smile was glazed and set as a china plate—and just as cold.

I escaped as soon as I could, and Marvin never needed urging to go home. Then as I came up from the cloak room, Pierre was there, with that faculty men have of knowing exactly where the woman of their desire is going to be.

"Tomorrow," he said, pressing my hand. "I'm mad about you."

"Good night," I said, trying to smile as I saw Marvin approach.

"Not good night until we're together," Pierre whispered.

I was silent on the drive home, while Marvin, with too many drinks, nodded heavily. Looking at Marvin, my whole being revolted. I couldn't go through that scene with Marvin tonight. I couldn't! I swept into the house ahead of him. He followed slowly, groggily, stopped at the stairs.

I went into the dining room and got the small brandy decanter, took it to my room. Then I dropped three sleeping tablets in it. I was still dressed when Marvin came in, wearing pajamas and a silly expression.

"A nightcap?" I suggested, not looking at him. I poured him a brandy, very short. One short one couldn't hurt, but it should put him to sleep quickly.

"You're so sweet to me," he mumbled.

I snatched up the nightgown and negligee that Julie had left on my carefully turned down bed.

"You rest. I'll be back in a moment," I called as I went into the dressing room.

Five minutes later I opened the door softly, then let out my breath. Marvin was sleeping heavily. I pulled the cover over him, crept into the other twin bed. It was so simple, why hadn't I thought of it before? He wouldn't know. He never did. One small glass of that couldn't hurt, and it would give me some respite. I drifted into a troubled sleep.

Sibyl came to lunch next day, and there was a family dinner that evening. So I had a good excuse for avoiding Pierre. How like Mum Sibyl had become, so relentlessly sure, so cruel in her judgment because she had conquered her heart.

THE next morning Pierre phoned, and the sound of his voice set me on fire. "I must see you, Iris. You'll destroy yourself going on like this. You're too lovely."

I understood the game he was playing, using a seeming honesty and my own weakness to win me. He knew I wanted love, needed it as you need bread and butter. Girls say they never think of such things. If they're human, they're lying. They do think and they dare and they measure—and they're afraid.

I was like that, measuring, fearing. I was twenty-five and I'd never known love, I told myself. Berk? I hated him, as he apparently hated me. Pierre was different. We understood each other.

"Tomorrow, tomorrow," I'd promise.

Then the third tomorrow, Mum telephoned. "The most awful thing has happened," she gasped.

"Renée? The baby?" I cried.

"No, it's your aunt Vida. She was arrested in a common gambling house raid last night. She's sunk to that. Living with some married man. His wife tipped off the police to their favorite rendezvous. And at this time, with Sibyl and Raoul in town!"

"Unfortunate, isn't it?" I said flatly.

Abruptly Mum turned her wrath on me. "And you wondered why I tried to save you from yourself? You, who were so like her."

Ten minutes later, Pierre phoned again. I told him I couldn't meet him that day. I couldn't.

Saturday night was the yacht club dance. I had a new gown, a lovely clinging thing of midnight blue. Marvin stared at me. "I never saw you so beautiful, Iris. Tonight I'm going to have some of that special brandy in your room."

"Tonight—" I echoed miserably. The dance was a brilliant affair and the evening half over when Pierre arrived. With a "by your leave," he cut in, swept me away from my partner.

"This game has got to end, Iris. I haven't been able to do a thing this week for thinking of you, wanting you."

I was trembling when we went out on the small balcony overlooking the shimmering waters of Lake Pontchartrain. "You're like a star tonight," he said, and then I was in his arms, and I knew resistance was at its end.

I had dared and denied life too long. "Tomorrow? Tomorrow?" Pierre kept insisting.

"Tomorrow sure," I whispered. "Your boat." Why hadn't we thought of that before? "Alone—"

"Oh, my darling, my very own darling. Why can't tomorrow be tonight?"

I too was afraid for tomorrow, afraid too of the night as Pierre held me close, kissed me again. Then I pushed my hair in place, fixed a smile on my lips and walked into the club, blinking in the lights. I stopped abruptly. Marvin was standing there, his face a terrible gray.

"I—I—heard you, Iris. I didn't mean to—but I did."

He was stammering horribly. "What could you have heard?" I demanded.

"I—I heard you say 'tomorrow.' What did you mean? You don't love him. You must love me, Iris." His voice was low, desperate.

"Please, Marvin!" I looked around desperately. "Be quiet. We can't have a scene."

"But you can't love somebody else," he was blubbering. "You made my world all over—you and the baby. I loved you. I'll make you happy. I'll give you everything. You know you said that first time—well, tonight you'll see—"

I couldn't endure it. Pushing past him, I ran to the powder room, stumbling on the carpeted stairs that led to the little lounge. I stopped abruptly. Sibyl was standing there, a compact in her hand. Her cool, critical aloofness filled the room.

My own panic must have been clear in my eyes as I whirled, started for the door again.

"What is it, Iris?" she demanded. "Are you tight?"

"No, of course not." I went to the vanity then, pretended to touch my face, but I was trembling so I couldn't guide the lipstick. Sibyl came and stood behind me.

"Iris, you've got to stop this business with Pierre Carieux. You seem to forget you are both married, and he's far beneath you—or," she amended icily, "our family."

I wheeled on her, facing her with all the pent-up fury of years. "Our family!" I cried. "What's so wonderful about it? Mum sold you and Renée into marriage like so much baggage. Renée's happiness is sheer luck—and look at you."

I laughed as she backed away from me, her face ashen in contrast to her make-up. "Look at you!" I repeated fiercely. "Eating your heart and soul and youth out with that old man. Feeding yourself on pride, on martyrdom. Well, I won't do it. I'm young and alive, and I'm going to stay alive. I've a right to live and love—and I'm going to take it."

The music had stopped, and there was laughter and footsteps on the stairs. I left Sibyl standing, speechless, and ran up to the cloakroom. I had to get away from there, and quickly. I wanted to go home.

I sent an attendant in search of Marvin. I had always been able to handle him. I could do it again. I must. The name ran like an echo through my mind as the page called, "Mr. Courtney. Mr. Courtney. Mr. Marvin Courtney—"

Finally he returned to me. "The doorman reports, Mrs. Courtney, that Mr. Courtney left a short while ago. He is sending the car back for you."

By the time I had my wrap, the car was there. Then Pierre appeared at the door.

"May I see you home, Mrs. Courtney?" Our eyes met. Politely I said, "Thank you."

What else was there to say with all the club attendants looking on, and our own chauffeur waiting? We drove in silence, the chauffeur's back a grim guardian, but he slid his warm fingers inside my short glove, to rest against my throbbing pulse.

As we reached the house, the bells rang three o'clock. I asked the chauffeur to wait, take Pierre to his home.

"You're in a rush to get rid of me," he whispered as we went to the door.

"It must be like this tonight. You don't understand. Till tomorrow."

"It is tomorrow," he murmured, and kissed me in the shrouding darkness of the great door. Then the night man opened the door, and as I went up the stairs, I heard the car going down the drive.

The lights were blazing in my bedroom. I opened the door defiantly, then laughed. Lying across the bed, fully dressed and sound asleep, was Marvin. So this was it! His great threat! He'd got drunk and as usual passed out—and I had worried about him. Quickly I gathered night things and, switching off the light, crossed to the guest room and went to bed, too exhausted to think or care. If only I had cared a little!

CHAPTER VIII

THE KNOCKING SEEMED to come from a long way off, after a confused dream that someone was beating a drum. "Mrs. Courtney! Mrs. Courtney!"

I opened my eyes slowly. Then came awake abruptly. My maid, Julie, was in the room, knocking on the open door, behind her, Herbert, the houseman, his normal light brown skin a gray-green.

"Please come. It's Mr. Courtney! We can't get him awake."

Julie held my robe, while my toes searched for my slippers, slid into them. "Mr. Jerod telephoned," Herbert was explaining. "He said it was important and to wake him, since it was near noon."

The bells were ringing twelve as I crossed the hall. Inside the door my evening wrap and bag still lay on the chair where I'd dropped them when I came in the night before, dropped them with such relief.

And Marvin lay as I'd seen him then, too, sprawled out, fully

dressed. His breath came in a low snarl, and his face was a terrible color, his lips purplish. His collar and tie were off, and his shirt open.

"I did that, ma'am," Herbert explained. "I thought maybe perhaps, ma'am, he'd had a little too much."

"Call Dr. Cameron, Julie," I said, "and you, Herbert, help get him undressed."

It was a big job. Marvin was a dead weight, and Herbert held him while I pulled off garments. Bending over him, I could hear his heart, it seemed to be rumbling rather than beating. We got him in pajamas just as Dr. Cameron came in.

"Sheerest luck that I was home," he said, "What's wrong?"

"I don't know," I said. "We can't wake him."

I stood there scarcely breathing while Dr. Cameron took pulse, heart and respiration, lifted Marvin's eyelids, pulled his jaw. "Does he take sleeping medicine? Looks like an overdose."

"No. He was drinking, but—"

Then I thought of the brandy. I rushed around the bed to the night stand that separated the two beds. The door to the lower section was open. On the floor, under the bed, the decanter lay, empty.

"He drank that last night," I said.

"What was in it?" Cameron demanded.

"About a pint of brandy and three or four sleeping tablets."

"In the brandy?" Cameron demanded. "But you said he didn't take them."

"That—that was different," I whispered, staring at Marvin lying there on the bed, battling for every breath. Dr. Cameron picked up the bedside phone, gave a number.

"Send an ambulance," he ordered.

"But what happened? He was all right last night." That's what they kept saying, each in their turn, coming into the house, and later to the hospital, all that afternoon, all that evening—Jerod and Renée, Mum, David's nurse, Dr. Cameron.

Then Pierre telephoned, at six. "What's happened, Iris? This is enough to put the fear of God in a man. He was all right last night."

"It was something he took, brandy and sleeping tablets. Oh, Pierre!"

"Can I come to you?"

"Oh, no. There's nothing anyone can do."

How horribly alone I was. All my life I'd been alone, and now the complete aloneness of it was closing in around me. I could see the thoughts back of guarded eyes: "She always was the strange one. Now what is she up to?"

I felt it at the hospital that night, sitting in the dimly lighted room; felt it in the way the nurse and Dr. Cameron looked at me. Then there was the specialist on poisons. He spoke about combinations and chemical effect. "Did you study chemistry, Mrs. Courtney?"

"No. I went to an academy. We didn't learn anything so useful."

WHEN he was gone, I realized the full implication of that question. Had I known what it would do? Had I deliberately concocted it?

At ten, the nurses insisted I go home. If there was any change, they would send for me. They were doing everything.

I didn't sleep that night at all. I called the hospital at seven. The nurse said, "No change."

I went downstairs. The staff wasn't about yet. I got the paper from the door, went to the kitchen. It had been a long time since I'd made a cup of coffee. I was a stranger in my own house, as I was a stranger to my child. They didn't need me. Nobody ever needed me—except Marvin, and I'd failed him. To escape thinking, I plugged in the coffee maker and opened the paper. The page one story leaped at me.

"MILLIONAIRE POISONED. MARVIN COURTNEY CRITICALLY ILL. Police are investigating the mysterious illness of Marvin Courtney, who was removed to Mercy Hospital yesterday, suffering from combination of poisons."

It was all there, the story of the yacht club dance and Marvin going home alone. "Mrs. Courtney, attended by Pierre Carieux left shortly afterward."

The doorbell was ringing. Herbert came in from his quarters, putting on his white coat. He stared in surprise at me in the kitchen, the coffee machine bubbling. Then he hurried through the hall. A moment later I heard Dr. Cameron's voice.

"Oh, Iris, I didn't think you'd be awake." His face was set and grave. "I didn't call you. There was nothing you could do. He never regained consciousness."

"We only want to talk to you, Mrs. Courtney . . . Only one picture . . . Could we have a story? . . . The police are down-

stairs . . . The dressmaker is here with your black, Mrs. Courtney . . ." Questions beating like rivets, trying to break through the battery of lawyers that surrounded me. Lawyers, lawyers, the best in the country, advising, "You don't have to answer—"

Two days of it, two nightmarish days without sleep, with the thought I could never trust sleep again. More lawyers, more questions—and the papers, the terrible discretion of them, with their subtle implications.

At the end of that second day, Mum came. She'd been before, but I hadn't seen her, not with the police and the lawyers. We were alone in the guest room which was my bedroom now.

"I never thought you'd do quite this," she said.

"I didn't poison him," I moaned. "I only meant him to have one drink, to put him to sleep. He came home and took it all."

"But you were having an affair with Pierre Carieux."

"That's a lie!"

"Club attendants heard you and Marvin quarreling over him. Everybody saw how you played up to him."

"I only wanted fun."

"Fun to kill your husband, to bring disgrace on an old, distinguished family, on your son. Don't you suppose David will know you betrayed his father?"

Betrayed his father! She'd spoken the truth without knowing it. Then her voice cut through. "I always said you were like Vida, but I did her an injustice. There's no comparison."

"Why should there be?" I cried furiously. "You modeled me after Vida, but leave it to you to do a better job. You wanted my destruction, and you may have it."

JULIE opened the door. "The lawyer is here." It had begun again; lawyers trying to save me. A whole battery of them, they succeeded in proving Marvin's death accidental. They saved me from open trial as my husband's murderer, but it left me to the doubtful mercy of private opinion.

The wave of talk started, rising fiercely and bitterly before Marvin was in his grave. The burial was to take place in Atlanta. The day before the funeral, Jerod came to see me. Nervous and apologetic, he told me the Atlanta aunts and uncles preferred that I didn't come to the funeral.

The talk increased. Not present at her husband's burial? The family know! Then Pierre Carieux closed his town house and went away with his family. People whispered, "She poisoned her husband to be free to carry on with Pierre, and he's run out on her."

Mum and Sibyl saw to it that I heard all the gossip. Renée, who might have brought me some comfort, was in the hospital with a new baby. I couldn't burden her with my troubles. So I stayed alone in the big house.

For three weeks I saw no one except lawyers, Mum, Sibyl, and the servants. The lawyers came daily. There was so much for them to do in connection with Marvin's will. It was so arranged that I got the income from his estate for life. The principal would go to David at twenty-one.

Every day in those weeks I played with David in the big garden. He was smart and quick, with an air that was Berk's. "I like playing with you," he said suddenly. "You must let me take you to the zoo sometime."

"I'd love it," I said. "Will you buy me popcorn and peanuts?"

He nodded, and his eyes, more green than blue now, twinkled. "If I buy them, will you let me eat them?" he asked.

I found myself laughing gaily in this new companionship with this little boy I didn't know. I felt strength rising in me, too, as I got a new view of everything. I began making plans. As soon as the will was settled, I'd take David and go away—California probably.

I had to live down the past and build a new future for us. I had learned you couldn't live on hate without betraying yourself. I'd spend all my life making up to David, whom I had also betrayed.

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS JUST two weeks after the funeral that Jerod drove up in mid-afternoon. I was on the terrace, and came around quickly to meet him. His face was grave and pale.

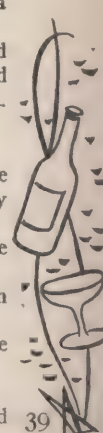
"Iris, I have more bad news for you," he said as we went into the house together. "Aunt Lou is going into court to break the will."

"Marvin's will? But she's seventy and has millions. What can she want?"

"She wants guardianship of David. She's going to prove you're unfit, if she can."

"But she couldn't do that—she couldn't!" I cried.

"I'm not so sure. A woman who admittedly gets her husband



drunk to avoid his—attentions, resulting in his accidental death — the talk about Pierre—

"Jerod, you've got to save me!" I was clinging to him. "I've found my one chance to happiness now, but I'm not important. It's David. I won't give him up to that old harridan. It was she who destroyed Marvin's life more surely than anything I did. She'd do it to David, and she'll live to be ninety. She can't have him!"

Poor Jerod, so correct, so unable to deal with such a problem, stalled, "After all, I am related to the boy from two sides, by marriage through Renée, by blood through Marvin."

"I know all that!" I cried. "What can we do?"

"I've talked to your lawyers here. They want to help you, but they have been Courtney estate lawyers—prejudiced, you know. But there's no time to lose. If only there were someone else."

I got up slowly. "There is someone else—a man who knows how to fight if he'll only take the case, Berkley Regan."

Jerod nodded. "A good fighter, if you can give him something interesting."

"I think I can," I said. "Will you drop me at his office?"

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"I'll handle it alone," I said, and went to get my coat and a picture of David.

"H AVE YOU AN appointment?" The girl was cool, distant.

"No, but this is very important. I hoped Mr. Regan might see me."

She turned to the switchboard. "Mrs. Iris DuPrey Courtney. Oh!" Then she nodded to me. "You may go in."

Berk's offices were impressive now. A secretary, notebook in hand, passed me as I went to the last door marked "Private."

Berk was standing at his flat-topped desk as I came in. He looked smooth and strong. My hands locked around my large purse as I came toward him.

"What's on your mind?" he asked as I reached the desk. "You beat one rap—now what?"

"You said you'd see me double damned before you'd do me a favor."

His lids flickered, the green eyes so like David's measuring me, as I went on, "I am.

Nothing else would have driven me here. No one but you can fight the case I've got now."

"Resorting to flattery?" he asked, and nodding me into a chair, sat down. I remained standing.

"It's the truth, Berk. Marvin Courtney's aunt is suing for the custody of David, my boy. She's old and fussy and terrible. She raised Marvin—made him what he was. She can't do this to David. I won't let her."

I sat down without realizing it, my hands outstretched across the desk. "He's so swell, such fun, so smart. You don't know how sweet they can be at four. I didn't know. But I do know now, and I won't let it happen."

Berk was doing tricks with a pencil absent-mindedly. "She's going to prove you're unfit? Looks like she can do it."

"That's what they're all saying. They want to punish me. They aren't thinking of him. I've done enough damage, but I won't see him destroyed."

Suddenly Berk blazed at me, "How do you know he's worth saving? What did he get from you? If treachery and snobbery is inherited, what a scoundrel you'll have. I loved you. Did that ever cross your mind? Did you know what love was? No! Anyway, my love wasn't good enough for the DuPreys. Then you marry this guy, the last of a worn-out line. What heritage is that? How do you know your son's worth saving?"

"He must be, Berk," I whispered, tears running down my cheeks. "He's not Marvin Courtney's son. He's yours."

I can still feel the silence of that office pressing down on me, then hear the soft whistle of Berk's breath. My head was bowed on my arms, and I was crying, relieving tears. It had been so long since I cried.

I heard him pacing the floor. After a while he said, "You better begin at the beginning, and for God's sake, tell the truth."

I talked for two hours, told the whole story, or most of it, leaving out only what he already knew. "It's not the way it looked," he said presently. "I took you for a thrill-chaser. I never thought you were afraid of anything—and you were. You were a coward, a double-crossing little coward. If Judas ever had a sister, you're the girl."

I had it all coming to me. I didn't want to fight back. I only wanted to sit there and listen to him talk, feel slowly the rising

conviction that he'd do something.

Then he told me what it would be. "You'd make a mistake to try to retain guardianship now. Don't let that old woman go into court. They'd drag the boy through all that rotten publicity."

"How about producing a little unfit testimony of your own? We can dig up a couple of doctors and psychiatrists that Marvin's consulted. Then we'll compromise—have your sister and her husband appointed guardians. They are blood relatives of the child. They have children of their own."

"I have to give him up?" I faltered.

"For a little while." His voice was harsh. "You've never really known him. It's better than you deserve."

Berk put it over that way. In ten days it was all settled. There wasn't any publicity. As far as our friends knew, I was going away for a while and Jerod and Renée were looking after David. Then I dropped out of sight.

I went to Chicago, got a job in a department store. I didn't need it. I wanted to work, to be busy, to be dog-tired. I did, I was. And after a while—I liked it. I got on well with people. Nobody said I was like Aunt Vida, selfish, brutal. Nobody reminded me of the DuPrey cold pride. I was just another girl.

I wasn't happy, but I wasn't miserable. I found a sort of peace, but my real joy was in those letters from New Orleans. Renée wrote regularly.

"Berk Regan is really a grand person and David is crazy about him. He comes to see him twice a week—"

Then they went to Pass Christian for the summer, and Renée wrote: "Berk has a beautiful boat, and he's spending the summer near here. David is with him constantly, and little Jerry goes along whenever possible. I can't imagine why people were so cold to Berk at first, but you know this city."

Day by day, week by week, the tie is growing stronger. Soon it will be Christmas, and I'm going home. I'll see him again—see them both, David and Berk.

Berk holds my life in his hands, his heart and David's. Will he ever trust me again? Would he love me for David's sake? Could he ever again love me for myself? I don't know. I can only hope—and try to be worthy.

Hollywood Reporter

(Continued from page 26)

where you'd never even think to look for it. The current top-flight Western, "The Outlaw," is full of oomph even after a dry cleaning it unexpectedly got. The girl in the revealing Western clothes is a nineteen-year-old named Jane Russell, who has everything—even acting ability. Western movies were once considered accepted fare for the sticks and for children, but the horse operas have discovered passion. And that noise in the distance is Billy the Kid turning over in his grave.

THE SCOUTS ARE OUT

Danny Kaye, a comedian who is wowing them in New York, is busy fighting off Hollywood offers. It's like that old studio joke in which the casting director says to

the girl, "You should be very honored. I've refused to see twenty girls today." "I know," she says. "I'm them." Anyway, you'll see Danny in the movies yet, and that means every other funny man in show town will have to look after his laurels. Paramount's finally snagged Lillian Gish from the legit. And bidding is rampant on a Broadway thriller of the psychological-horror type called "Angel Street." A sixteen-year-old girl named Adele Inge is likely to become the second skating star when the Hollywood scouts drag her off to stardom.

PUT THESE ON YOUR "DON'T MISS" LIST

Shirley Temple's newest, "Kathleen"—

a honey of a picture. Olivia de Havilland's "Saratoga Trunk," and, if you don't mind a lump in your throat, Jeannette MacDonald and Gene Raymond in M-G-M's new and elaborate version of "Smilin' Through." And there's "Tales of Manhattan" for dancing and laughter.

INCIDENTALLY:

Ray Jones, Universal's chief portrait photographer, who has built many a simple miss into a glamour girl with his camera, advises, when you go to have your picture taken, "Make up as if you were going out for the evening, keeping your make-up at a minimum. Wear simple clothes, and remember an eccentric hairdress or hat will date you." Good advice to remember.

No Trust in Her

(Continued from page 7)

my mind. She must be mine and mine alone. So we were married.

I was foolish enough to question her about previous affairs only once. She smiled that slow smile and didn't answer. I cursed under my breath, but didn't press the point. I had had other women—too many women—and it was better if I didn't know the other men in her past. A red haze of anger filmed my mind when I thought of them—anger that, Heaven help me, should have warned me in time.

I felt instinctively that Lila was a true wife, but always there was that little torturing devil of doubt. She was everything I could ask for; everything that any man could ask for. Our intimate embraces were an ecstasy I had never hoped to know.

But I thought of those other men. Surely they had felt the same way. I wanted to get my wife out of their sight, where they couldn't see her—and remember. Every man who smiled when we passed on the street might be a former lover. And so I applied for a transfer to a job in Arizona, and got it. In Arizona, Lila would be mine, all mine.

She never questioned. I know now that her former lovers were but figments conjured up by my own jealous imagination, but I didn't know it then. Passionate yet submissive, yielding wholeheartedly, her own splendid capacity for love never satiated—that was Lila.

WE'D been married a year when the blow fell. I guess I was expecting it, subconsciously, all along. I thought I was prepared, but I wasn't. And it knocked me out on my feet.

I had just returned to the hotel where we were staying. Ordinarily we rented a tourist cabin. But the bridge we were putting in was a small one and wouldn't take long. The town was small too, and there weren't many cabins for rent. The hotel was old and big, and the rates were reasonable. So we stayed there.

I'll never forget how Lila looked that night. It was raining outside, and I was soaking wet. The room was cheerful, with the lights pleasingly low and Lila in a red satin lounging robe I had bought her. She had been reading a book, but laid it aside when she heard my step in the hall.

"Jack!"

"Easy," I said, laughing and holding her at arm's length. "I'm pretty wet, sweetheart."

"Jack. Wait till I tell you."

Lila wasn't seductive now. She looked like a happy kid, her eyes big and wide and excited. "Jack, I went to see a doctor today. We're going to have a baby."

Headless of my wet clothing, she flung herself into my arms and pressed her lips against mine.

I straightened abruptly, swaying on my feet, feeling as if the floor had been cut from beneath me. In the sudden silence that fell, I could hear the water dripping off my hat and onto her robe. Drip—drip—drip, staining the material with ugly

splotches. But I didn't care. Nothing mattered any more.

I reached up and gripped her hands tightly, jerked them from around my neck. I had to move slow and easy so that my fingers wouldn't go around that pulsing white throat and twist it until she was black in the face. I wasn't ready to be tried for murder. No woman was worth that, I told myself.

"Jack." Her voice was strained now. "Why do you look at me like that? I thought you'd be happy!"

My voice stuck in my throat. I started to speak and had to begin again. "How long," I asked, "has it been going on?"

Lila whimpered like a hurt child. "Three months, the doctor said."

I found my voice with a roar that seemed to shake the walls. That red haze was filming my eyes as I clutched her white throat and hurled her from me.

"I don't mean that!" I shouted. "Who is the man responsible? When did it happen?"

I thought of the afternoons Lila had spent alone, also evenings sometimes, when we had to work late to finish pouring cement on a job that couldn't wait. Lila with her lover, and only a few minutes afterward, perhaps, coming to me with love in her eyes and deceit in her heart.

"Jack! You're crazy. There was never anyone, never anyone but you."

I took a deep breath and got myself in hand. The room hadn't changed—only my life. There were the same low-turned lights, Lila's book lying on the stand.

"I've been around, you two-timing cheat!" I said in a voice that was low, vicious. "I've kept myself clean since we were married, but I wasn't so lucky before. I'm cured, understand. But the doctor who cured me said I could never father a child. I should have told you before, but I didn't. I'm clearing out now, before I do something I don't want to. You can take yourself and your brat to the man responsible for it, and give him my regards!"

I didn't even pack a grip. In wet, soggy clothing, with only a few dollars in my pocket, I left the room and boarded a bus.

"Take me as far as this will go," I ordered, shoving the money at the driver. "Then let me out."

We drove maybe two hundred miles before he stopped at a little jerk town and indicated that this was the end of the line for me. It was daybreak by that time, and I was fuzzy with sleep. My clothes were wrinkled where they had dried on me, and a stubble of beard had sprouted on my face.

I hadn't a cent of money, but when I came to an all-night restaurant on the main drag, I went in and hit up the night clerk for a cup of coffee.

He set it out without comment, and I gulped it thirstily. The hot drink cleared my mind somewhat, and I tried to think things out. During the long bus ride, I had become reconciled to the thought of cutting myself off from everyone I had known. Lila would no doubt look for alimony, and



I didn't intend to pay her a cent. She could push the charges, but if I changed my name and buried myself somewhere where no one knew me, she'd have a hard time collecting.

But it came to me then, sitting on a polished stool in a deserted diner, that I had the best case in the world against Lila. I had only to submit the testimony of the doctor who had examined me four years before and I would be cleared of all responsibility. The fact that Lila was carrying a child which could not possibly belong to me would convince any judge or jury. There was no necessity for me to hide like an escaped convict.

I hung around the diner until nine o'clock, despite the clerk's suggestion I move on. "I want to make a telephone call, buddy," I told him. "The office opens at nine. I'll have some money wired out here. When it comes, I'll give you two bits for that coffee you put out."

He didn't say anything after that, only kept looking at me curiously. At nine o'clock I called my home office and reversed the charge. They accepted the call as soon as I told them my name.

The boss was furious when I told him I'd walked out on the job. The charges mounted while he told me what was what. But good foremen are hard to get, and in the end, he wired me a hundred bucks and told me to report personally.

When I did, he had me transferred to Pennsylvania where the new super highway was just getting under way. The job was expected to last for a long time and, as it would take me away from Arizona and Lila, I accepted.

LIFE went on much as it had before I met Lila. I worked hard, but the fever was still in my blood; visions of my wife's soft arms and willing lips still rose to haunt me. There is always a woman for the man who needs one, but where I used to find surcease and even a measure of pleasure, the women whose easy charms I now accepted left me coldly contemptuous. They don't make many women like Lila, I found. Women like her live for loving, and certainly there were none such among the slatterns who loved for a living.

I don't know how I found my way into church that Sunday. Religion never had meant much to me, but when I stepped into the hushed, cool quiet of the huge cathedral, I felt that here was something I had needed for a long while.

After the service, I walked slowly back to my boarding house. I didn't expect to go again, ever, but I kept thinking of a girl who sang in the choir. I didn't know

her name, but she had brown hair and her eyes had noticed me as I sat uncomfortably in the back row of seats.

The following Sunday I was there again. This time I was sure she smiled.

I went three Sundays before I had the courage to wait outside until she appeared. Then I asked to take her home.

"But I don't know you!" She glanced at a tall, blond girl who stood beside her. "Will you go along with us, Margaret?"

Margaret eyed me steadily, as if waiting for an explanation. "My name is Jack Bates," I said coolly. "I work on the super highway and board at Mrs. Baxter's place on Cairn Avenue. I'm not wanted by the police, to the best of my knowledge, and—"

But they were laughing then. Linking arms, we walked down the street in the direction they said they wanted to go.

Grace Haverford was so unlike Lila that there was no comparison. Perhaps that's why I cottoned to her right from the start. Heaven knows why she went for me.

She had light brown hair and candid gray eyes that seemed to search out your soul; slender, pretty despite a minimum of make-up. I got a big kick out of showing her around. She was so childishly pleased with everything—coaster rides in the park, an occasional movie. I bought a secondhand car, and we drove to Philly one afternoon and spent the evening there. I wanted to show her a really good time, but she didn't enjoy it nearly so much as the simple pleasures they had in the little town where she lived with her mother and two sisters. Her father had died when she was a child.

And I—well, I thought she was putting on an act. I guess I knew there are good women in the world, but I'd never had much of a chance to get acquainted with them, chasing around over the country as I did. It never occurred to me that Grace was the kind of girl any decent man would give ten years of his life to have for a wife. I figured her lack of sophistication as a pretty pretense. Despite the clearness of her eyes, I took for granted that she knew the angles and had been around.

I DON'T know when the idea of marrying her first occurred to me. There was the little matter of divorcing Lila, but I was sure that wouldn't be much bother. I hadn't seen her in a year and a half. For all I knew, she had already divorced me for desertion and snared the father of her kid for support.

I hired a couple of good lawyers and they traced her down. Strangely, Lila had come to Pennsylvania, too. She hadn't divorced me, but she promised not to con-

test the suit. And after that I had clear sailing.

Grace loved me. I knew it in the swift smile that lighted her lips and the way her cheeks flamed prettily when I brushed her hair with my lips and murmured in her ear.

"Gee, kid, I think you're swell," I told her time and again. "Can't you go for me just a little?"

"I go for you a lot, Jack," she'd answer

room of their little two-story cottage and turned on the light. Everyone else was in bed.

I tossed my hat carelessly on a chair and pulled Grace down beside me on the couch. "Let's get married, kid," I said.

She lifted startled eyes and searched my face. "All right, Jack."

I folded her in my arms and kissed her thoroughly, until, laughing and disheveled, she pulled herself free.

"Tomorrow?" I asked eagerly.

"Silly! In about six months, Jack. We'll have to be engaged awhile and really get to know each other."

"Isn't love enough?"

"Not for Mother," Grace said slowly. "She'd be terribly disappointed if we didn't give her a chance to show off before her friends."

"Okay," I yielded, "but surely your husband-to-be rates a kiss?"

She came to me as naturally as a bird winging home. Had the heavens fallen, we would not have known it in the eternity of that embrace. Grace was trembling when finally she fought free of my arms.

"You mustn't ever do that again," she said shakily. "Not—not—until we have the right."

"Do what again?"

"Kiss me—like that."

"Like this?"

Despite her struggles, her traitorous lips responded to my own demanding ones. Against her will, her arms crept about my neck, drawing me close, even as she fought to get away.

"Grace darling, I love you so!"

May God forgive me for uttering that lie! Grace loved me, as she thought I loved her. I shut my ears to her little whimpering cries and deadened my heart to the pangs that even my calloused conscience could feel. And as I held her in my arms, unresponsive but loving me still, I closed my eyes and thought of Lila—Lila who knew everything that this girl did not.

Afterward, my own eyes were wet with remorse. "I didn't know, Grace," I pleaded

miserably. "I'm sorry."

Two terribly inadequate words!

"You're not angry, Jack?" Her hand was timid on my arm. "I'm the one who should apologize. I was such a baby."

Angry? I left her that night and walked till morning. My past had never bothered me before. Then I told myself that since I would not have questioned Grace, she had no right to question me. But I knew now that Grace had no past. I realized what I should have guessed before, the untouched purity of this girl whose love I had won. And I was so unworthy. I would tell her of my past and ask forgiveness.

ON THE FASHION HORIZON

Sports Clothes Are Giddy

LITTLE PLAID SKATING BREECHES, inspired by knee-length shorts, are smooth for either ice skating or roller skating. Top this with a tailored shirt or a boy's sweater and you're fashion-right.

BOLD, BRIGHT SCARVES will giddy up your last season's frocks and see you smartly through this trying in-between season when you're tired of the old and it's a little too early for the new.

COLORED SNAKESKIN SHOES in green, yellow, red, purple, and orange are slated as a spring novelty. You could get some now to pep up the old wardrobe and then wear them right through the coming season.

PUT A SPLASHY FEATHER in your calot or snap-brim felt to give new life to the old bonnet and keep your own spirits perky. Another gay fad is the matching of a small hat and belt. This may be done by embroidering the same design on both, using identical ornamental pins on hat and belt or by knitting or crocheting a matching "set."

WATCH THE HEMLINES to the new sports and play-time clothes that the smart shops are beginning to feature. The new length will strike you just above the ankles, making the full skirts look as graceful as ballet costumes.

Evening Clothes Are Glamorous

LUMINOUS COMBS—two or three of them—thrust into the hair glitter wickedly under artificial lights!

BALLET SLIPPERS and a **NARROW, BRIGHT-COLORED SUEDE BAND** tied bracelet fashion around your ankles are new and exciting. Makes your ankles look amazingly slim, too.

FILMY WHITE GOWNS go to very formal parties accented by deep, dark polish on the fingernails. Misty black frocks in the new ballet length are incredibly charming when the fingernails wear delicate polish.

TINY MUFF BAGS OR FANS MADE OF FLOWERS are utterly adorable and just too, too feminine for candle-light hours for you to resist.

AN EVENING SCARF AND FULL-LENGTH COLORED GLOVES will make an old evening frock seem new.

unsteadily. "You know that, don't you?"

Yes, I knew that. And I appraised her cautiously before suggesting marriage. Grace wouldn't put a fever in a man's blood; she'd be soothing and restful instead. In her arms he would find comfort and understanding. If I married her, I wouldn't have to worry about other men. Some women must learn to love, while others are born knowing the wiles of Cleopatra. Lila had known, but Grace—well, I could teach her what she didn't already know.

We had returned from a late show the night I proposed. She walked into the living

A decision like that is easily made but hard to keep. Grace was radiantly happy in the days that followed, planning our life together.

Her mother, charming, gracious, welcomed me into the home. "I won't be losing a daughter," she said bravely. "I'll be gaining a son." And so I put off my decision to tell. Time enough for that, later, I excused myself.

When I was with Grace, I would have died for her. But we were together only a few hours each evening. During the day, when I was on the job, working with the same tough crew, things were different. And Bob Manners started the ball rolling.

"We never see you any more, Jack," he said, eyeing me curiously. "Got a skirt?"

I FELT like knocking him down, but it wasn't Bob's fault. We had helled around a bit together since coming on the job, and he didn't know about Grace. Somehow I could never bring myself to mention her name to the men on the job.

"What's it to you?"

"Nothing." He shrugged. "Thought maybe you'd like to go along for a drink tonight, that's all."

I considered a moment. Grace and her mother were in the city shopping, and I faced an evening alone. Being in love and planning a marriage didn't mean giving up all the recreation I had known before, I reflected.

"Okay," I said. "I'll meet you at the hotel."

Neither of us was really drunk when we wound up at the house on Turner's Road. I had told Bob about Grace and our plans to be married, and he insisted that we celebrate.

I didn't intend to go too far, but Bob never could handle his drinks any too well, and when I realized the sort of dive we were in, I couldn't leave him. They'd roll a drunk here quicker than I could down a beer, and Bob was already on the way to becoming maudlin. I couldn't get him to leave, because he had his eye on one of the over-rouged hostesses keeping the customers interested at the bar. I told him I'd wait when he finally caught her invitation to join her.

I watched the girls cynically. No more of this for me. I'd learned my lesson. A good woman was worth a roomful of bums. Not that they weren't good-looking, I told myself, as my appreciative eye appraised their various qualities in a detached sort of way—until I saw the girl by herself at the end of the bar.

I signaled the madam and she crossed to my chair, displaying a gold-toothed smile. "You like the girls, eh?"

"The one on the end," I said, "with the black hair—who is she?"

"That is Viola, a new girl. Very nice."

At her call, the girl came toward us, and I knew I hadn't been mistaken. The girl was Lila!

"Viola, the gentleman. You understand." Her smirking glance indicated the staircase to the rooms above.

There was a low-voiced conversation, Lila desperately protesting, and I knew she was refusing to see me alone. The madam looked at me and smiled, then issued her orders in a low voice. Resignedly Lila headed for an upstairs room, and I followed.

"Quite a comedown, isn't it?" I asked casually, as I closed and locked the door. "Where's the kid?"

Lila didn't answer. Angered by her silence, I gripped her shoulders and swung her around. She made no move to resist, but her eyes refused to meet mine.

"I said, 'Where's the kid?' And what are you doing in a dump like this?"

Her eyes lifted then, filled with despair and hate. "He's in good hands," she said. "Your little son looks like you, Jack, but you'll never see him. As for me—well, I have to take care of him, since you ran out, and waiting on table doesn't bring in enough money."

"You're lying," I said flatly. "The kid isn't mine. If he had been, I'd have moved heaven and earth to see he got everything possible. You're no good, Lila. You never were and you never will be. And your fatherless kid won't be any better!"

She struck me then—hard, and some devil I hadn't known I possessed made me grip her arms and drag her to me. "I paid for this," I said, leering into her stricken face. "Just remember that."

I warned her to remember, but it was I who would carry the memory forever.

Later, disgusted, sick to my soul, I demanded that she get a decent job. "Give me your address," I said. "I'll send you some money. You were my wife once, and though you don't deserve it, I'll see that you don't have to do this."

But she refused. I had purchased her kisses, but I could not buy her heart nor her confidence.

FOR two months I drove myself, physically, to the limit of my endurance. I was determined to forget the past. My life would begin when Grace became my wife and I had the right to her love. I felt that I was a new man, turning over a new leaf. It took control, sometimes, to tear myself away when her lips and eyes told me that she would yield. But I did it. And I thanked God for that.

Our engagement was half up; three months gone and three to go. Three short months, and heaven would be mine.

Grace had been unusually pensive the past week, and one night, as she walked about the room, straightening the flowers on the table, rearranging magazines in a rack, I sensed her restlessness.

"Anything wrong, dear?"

She flashed me a quick smile and came over to sit on the arm of my chair. I slid my arm around her waist and hugged her close.

"Would you like to be married next week, Jack?" she asked softly.

"Next week! It can't be too soon, Grace. But why?"

"I'm going to have a baby."

Suddenly, I was no longer in the living room of the Haverford cottage. I was back in a hotel room, my clothing dripping wet, and a dark-haired woman was saying softly, "There was never anyone, never anyone but you—"

I must have looked like a man dying as I staggered to my feet and stumbled from the house. Grace tried to hold me, with frantic arms on my shoulders, hurt, bewildered, but I couldn't stay. I lurched out of the house and somehow started the car and drove like a madman down the road. I was half insane, I guess, but I knew

where I was going. A doctor's office was what I wanted—a doctor's office where, no matter what the verdict, I felt I should go completely mad.

I found one, and at the end of the conference I saw myself for the utterly contemptible, callous fool that I had been. I could say, "I'm sorry," and, "I didn't know," until Gabriel blew his horn, but never would I be able to right the wrong I had done to two women who had loved and trusted me.

"It was a temporary trouble," the doctor explained, smiling, "but there is no reason in the world why you shouldn't have as large a family as you wish."

If ever a man knew hell on earth, I knew it that night. I could have killed myself, but that would be too easy an out. There was Grace with the baby on the way, loving me, trusting me, and Lila struggling to support a child, sinking deeper into the mire with each passing day. She hated me now, and I couldn't blame her. But suddenly I yearned to see the child I had never known—Lila's son and mine.

I went to the house on Turner's lane, knowing Lila would be there. Her face hardened, but she didn't protest when we went up the stairs together. But behind the closed door, her mask gave way and she broke into scalding tears.

"Why do you come here?" she sobbed brokenly. "Surely you have done enough."

"Lila," I said, groping for words, "I've just come from a doctor. I—I've been a fool. I know now the baby is mine."

She dried her eyes then, and looked around the room; a cheap iron bed with a hard mattress, torn wallpaper, grimy windows and buzzing flies.

"What's it to me?" she asked. "I like it here."

I sank on the bed and buried my face in my hands. "If you ever loved me," I said, "tell me now what to do."

She listened quietly while I told the story. "I want you," I said. "I have more to make up to you than to anyone. But Grace—Grace trusts me."

Lila's fingers rumpled my hair. "I trusted you too, Jack. And because you broke my heart, I know the pain that your Grace will have to face. I have gone through it. So it doesn't matter. But go to her, Jack, if only for your memory of me."

"But you, Lila? You can't stay here."

"I won't, Jack. That's a promise. I'll clear out to where no one ever heard of me. I'll stay clean and Sonny shall have a good home and never know. I'll manage somehow. To him, his father will be dead. I'll do that, because I loved you once—I still do."

I didn't trust myself to kiss her good-by. I left the shabby little house and drove to Grace's home. I was burning my bridges behind me.

GRACE made no effort to interrupt as I poured out my story for the second time, simply, omitting no detail, making no excuses. But when I was done, her gray eyes blazed in a pale face as she ordered me from the house.

I didn't think of my car. I left it in the lane, with the keys in the ignition. And I staggered when I left her—as much as I did three hours later when I groped my way to the hotel, dead drunk.

I was laughing to myself, laughing with tears on my cheeks. A cop stopped me once, but when I blurted out the name of my hotel, he started me toward it, shaking his head dubiously.

"I might have known it," I muttered as I lurched along. "The smug little prude. No understanding, no capacity for real love. Give me a Lila every time. But I'm glad I found out—glad—glad!"

Until late the next morning, I lay in a drunken stupor. The telephone ringing wildly roused me from sleep. I lifted the receiver angrily and shouted into the phone.

It was the desk clerk. "A special delivery letter, Mr. Bates. Shall I send it up?"

"Okay," I said. "And a morning paper."

I tossed the bellhop a quarter and looked at the letter. It was in Grace's fine handwriting, with her name and address neatly written in the upper left-hand corner.

I tossed it onto the bed. There was nothing she could say to me now.

Picking up the paper, I glanced at the headlines. There had been an accident last night—in the quarry outside of town. A car had gone over the quarry lip, instantly killing the driver, Miss Grace Haverford, who was alone in the machine—

There was a lot more, but I didn't read it. I didn't need to. As clearly as if I had been there, I saw what had happened. Grace, desperate, my car in the drive, the yawning quarry—

I dropped the paper and picked up the letter, with terror gnawing at my vitals. Tearing it open, I scanned the contents feverishly.

"Dear Jack," I read. "The hardest thing I ever did was send you away tonight. How

I longed to hold and comfort you, to tell you that nothing mattered except us two.

"But I couldn't, my darling. And though I cannot live without you, I sent you away. Your first duty, my love, my own, is to the little child who is already born and facing the world. I don't matter, Jack. Nothing matters except the little baby whose destiny and happiness is in your hands. You must see to it that he has his chance.

"The decision I have made is an easy one, my sweet. Nothing will be complex or complicated after I am gone. And the little life I take with me will be happier by far. Good-by, Jack. I love you so—"

I broke down then, for the first time in my life. Dry, wracking sobs shook my body, but there were no tears to wash away the enormity of my sin.

I felt like an old man, broken in body and spirit, as I dressed and took a taxi to the Haverford home. But the job before me, the task of rearing my child as Grace had requested, helped me square my shoulders and look ahead.

For three days I lived in a nightmare of weeping women, sobbing voices, and falling tears. Then I was looking for the last time at the form of the girl who had loved me more than life itself. She lay as if sleeping, those clear, gray eyes closed forever. And then she was gone from my sight.

THE day after the funeral, I sought Lila. I would have given my life if I could have held Grace in my arms just once before she went away and honestly given to her the love that Lila irrevocably possessed. But love is like a tumbleweed, blowing

hither and yon, until it finds a fertile spot in which to cling and root forever. Grace gave me all her love, but Lila had long held my heart. I didn't mean it to be that way, but there was nothing I could do.

My chance for happiness was gone. I knew that when the smirking madam told me Lila wasn't in. Where had she gone? She didn't know. But she was no longer there.

I didn't believe the search would be hopeless, at first. I don't now. But Lila, keeping her promise to me, had left town for a new start in life. In all probability, she didn't know that Grace had died.

Since that day, I have advertised in daily newspapers all over the country, asking Lila to return, to let me know where she is. I have appealed to the police, without result. Private searching agencies have driven me bankrupt. And still I have no answer.

I am still searching. No matter what she is or where she may be, I want her. I want to know and learn to love the little son I have never seen and whom I once disowned.

Lila—if you read this, you will know that my heart is empty. I am not the hard, arrogant, carefree man you once knew. I'm pleading humbly for another chance. Your last words were that you still loved me. I believe that, and I'll never stop wanting you, my sweet.

I don't know where you are. It seems I have searched every inch of every state, but always you are gone. Someday dear—someday I'll find you. And when I do, your forgiveness will make my happiness complete.

For Beauty's Sake

(Continued from page 25)

ultra-feminine coiffure. The delicacy of her brows is pointed up by dreamy, long-lashed eyes. Her slender fingers taper to unbelievably long nails. All these contribute to the general effect of exquisiteness.

If you are tall and slender, follow Loretta Young's lead. Play up your slimness instead of bemoaning the lack of robust curves and coloring. Wear filmy scarves, draped skirts, narrow belts around your waist. Wear trailing hostess gowns at home. Carry a long cigarette holder, if you smoke, and learn to handle it gracefully.

Here's a new discovery on keeping the hands satin smooth to match your delicate appearance: Apply hand lotion *before and after* immersing them in water.

★ **Ginger Rogers'** dancing feet have won her fame and fortune. Naturally she wants to keep them supple and feeling gay. She suggests the sandcrab exercise to relieve fatigue. It is done by crumpling up single sheets of cleansing tissue and picking them up with the bare toes.

★ **Carole Lombard**, whose wit is sparkling, says that she did not want to be labeled as any one "type" because she would like for her appearance to be as fresh and surprising as her wisecracks. So, she frequently changes her hair-do and is as apt to appear in slacks and lumber jacket as in sleek satin and emeralds!

If you are a girl who has changing moods, then you would be smart to follow Carole's tip and collect a varied enough wardrobe and selection of coiffures to dress up to each.

★ **Maureen O'Hara**, a vision of red-haired, jade-eyed Celtic loveliness, is a new star shooting brightly across the Hollywood firmament. She credits much of her success to self-control. Don't jitter, she says. Conserve your vitality and make every movement direct and expressive. This will give you an inward confidence and an outward poise. Since the hands are the most frequent offenders with aimless gestures, practice relaxing exercises. If you feel your nerves getting taut, lift the arms at the elbow, then completely relax them and let them drop to your lap with the wrist leading.

★ Conversation pieces, **Mary Martin** says, helped her overcome shyness in meeting strangers. These pieces, she explains, are scarves or belts embroidered with amusing maps, action figures, or phrases; a beruffled parasol, a necklace or bracelet of some unusual pattern or material—such as acorns, peanuts or even buttons strung together and lacquered with nail polish. Anything that is provocative enough to arouse the interest and curiosity of the people you meet and lead them to question you is a conversation piece.

★ While **Dorothy Lamour** won fame with her sarong, her eyes have not gone unnoticed. Indeed, it is their expressiveness which plays such a great part in her charm. Here is a trick of hers for making the eyes appear larger: Draw, with a light brown eyebrow pencil, a line along your eyelid just above the lashes, and just what it does for your eyes!

★ **Ann Sheridan** simply radiates sex appeal. There is something so exuberant, vital, and alive about her beauty that columnists, at a loss to describe her, coined the word oomph girl. What is the essence of this type of personality? How can it be emphasized? Well, if you'll study Ann Sheridan carefully, you will see that she plays up her physical assets with a disarming frankness. Whether it's a short skirt, a low V neckline, or a gaudy belt, Ann will literally snap her fingers at fashion and have it cut to her own special figure. If she wants to wear slacks and go without make-up, she does. In other words, Ann doesn't compromise. If you are this type, do the same thing Ann does, dare to put big bows on your shoes (if you have a yen for that), or exchange the buckles on the belts for your slim waist for the clip that other girls pin to their shoulders. In other words, dare to do and wear the young, gay things that you feel you like.

I Picked the Wrong Women

(Continued from page 24)

I'm afraid I was a glamour-dazzled young girl when I married him. There wasn't much—love between us."

"I'm sorry," I said again, and feelingly.

Her heavily fringed greenish eyes dwelt on me deeply, and I felt a little prickle all along my spinal column.

"I'm lonely," she said in her low, husky voice. "I've got to find a job, be busy—or I'll be a pathological case. I had intended to be a nurse. In fact, I had my cap when I met Walter. I loved the work. That's why I'd like to be near it again."

"Why, that makes you all the more perfect for this job," I said enthusiastically. "Now, if we can come to an agreement on salary—"

"I'll accept twenty dollars a week," Rhoda Mack said.

I hoped I didn't blink. Fifteen dollars had been my top price, but if I made good old Ellen wait another while for her next increase, I could afford this luxury.

"Settled," I said joyfully. "If you knew how I'd been trying to find anyone at all suitable, you'd understand how delighted I am to get you, Mrs. Mack."

"Then we may as well begin with 'Rhoda,' don't you think?" she smiled. "I'll report at eight in the morning, Doctor."

It seemed an ungodly hour for this lovely creature—but, after all, I couldn't upset my whole routine just because I'd taken on the perfect receptionist.

That's what Rhoda proved to be. Even Ellen could find no fault with her. Rhoda did her job too well for that. She was just what the maple office furniture and the prints and the thick-piled rug needed.

Lois expressed no interest in my new receptionist. She never came near the office herself, didn't seem even curious about my new rooms. I caught Ellen looking at me with troubled eyes sometimes. And it was finally she who asked me bluntly, "Do you know that Lois is seeing a lot of young Harley Riordon?"

"Riordon?" I blundered stupidly. "Where on earth would she meet a Riordon?"

"On the golf course, possibly, or in some cocktail club," Ellen said. "The point is, she's met him, and he's driving her about everywhere in that white convertible of his. Lois is going to burn her fingers if she isn't careful, Penn. Riordon's not in her class."

"Oh, I'm sure the whole thing's innocent enough," I shrugged.

"Lois doesn't have enough to do," Ellen said. "You should give her a house to manage."

When I spoke to Lois casually about knowing Harley Riordon, she flared up, to my astonishment.

"It's rather late to start choosing my friends," she said defiantly. "Harley has time for me."

Instead of jarring me awake, that last sentence made me mad. It was a deliberate crack at me for having so little time to give to her.

"I'm busy night and day making you a living!" I shouted. "The least you can do

is behave yourself and not cause unpleasant gossip that may harm my practice."

So instead of talking matters over reasonably, we both lost our tempers, and relations were strained between us.

How soothing it was, then, to see every day a woman who had sympathy and understanding of my work and its problems. Rhoda was intelligent and keenly interested in my hospital project.

"You'll have it," she said confidently. "I can just see it—white and shining and perfectly equipped, and only Dr. Fielding to direct its policies. No quibbling with a hospital board to dictate and cut expenses."

There was a little edge of excitement in my laugh. I heard it myself.

"That's several years in the future," I warned her.

"Maybe not so far as you think now," she smiled, her strangely exciting green eyes dwelling upon me warmly.

I began to realize the fascination Rhoda held for me. I found myself wanting to see more of her than I could during office hours, and I fell into the habit of driving her home after work, sometimes stopping for a cocktail on the way.

If I felt guilty, I blustered to myself that if my wife could see more of Harley Riordon than she should, I had a perfect right to indulge the pleasure and stimulation I found in Rhoda. It was perfectly harmless, I assured myself, refusing to heed the way my blood quickened when her shoulder brushed mine as we rode, the way I thought about her constantly.

THEN one night I reached home to find Lois very ill. I was frightened at the sight of her bloodless face, her dazed look. She would tell me nothing and I had to be a little brutal about insisting on an examination. Lois cried hysterically all through it.

It didn't take me long to discover the truth. Lois had been pregnant and had been to see some shyster doctor whose name she refused to give me. Well, she paid for that, in intense physical agony, but I paid in mental torture. It hurt to the depths to know that Lois would deliberately destroy the child she knew I longed for and, worse than that, her chance ever to have another. I told her this bluntly.

"I'm glad!" she cried hysterically. "I've never wanted children and you know it. I'm not the mother type. What kind of a home and family life would we give a child? You're never with me, you care more for your old practice than you do for me—"

She went on justifying her attitude while I sat, feeling old and bruised and hopeless. Life hadn't been going to be like this, but somehow it had turned out this way, and I was crushed and disillusioned.

What more natural than that I should turn to Rhoda in this crisis? Rhoda was warmly sympathetic and understanding. She comprehended my love for my work, my deep disappointment in my marriage. I began spending every spare hour with Rhoda.



It was she who suggested that I close the office Thursday afternoons during the summer months, insisting that I worked too hard. Ellen demurred.

"Your patients depend on you every day of the week, Penn. No other doctors in Montmorency close their offices half a day a week."

"They will when they come to their senses," Rhoda argued. "You owe it to your patients to keep in good physical trim."

"Penn's too healthy now. That's what's the matter with him," Ellen said bluntly, and I flushed with anger.

I took the half days and spent them with Rhoda defiantly. We played golf and took long drives, dining at some country inn, sometimes dancing. To hold her slender, willowy body in my arms was dizzy excitement. I knew things couldn't go on this way indefinitely. There was too much awareness between us, too much compelling attraction.

But was it more, I asked myself unhappily? I had made one ghastly mistake and couldn't afford another. Already my work was suffering, as it inevitably must when one is emotionally upset. Somehow this turmoil in which I was enmeshed had to be straightened out.

But I wanted to do it in my own way, and I resented it when Ellen interfered. What business was it of hers? So things were until the night Rhoda asked me to come in for a cocktail, after we'd been to dinner in a neighboring town.

She was so beautiful and vivid this night, her skin ivory in some soft, black clinging material, lips scarlet and warm and inviting. Inside, her fingers brushed mine as she handed me the cocktail glass, and my whole body tingled with the shock. She looked at me through her thick, dark lashes.

"Ellen doesn't approve of us," she said abruptly. "She had me on the carpet today."

"What right had she—" I began.

Rhoda laughed throatily. "Don't be angry, Penn. I wasn't. I realized that the woman is in love with you, that she's jealous, and so I couldn't blame her."

I laughed shortly.

"Don't be ridiculous. She feels possessive perhaps because she's known me all my life. What did she say?"

Rhoda shrugged and set down her glass, took mine and set it down, too. Deliberately and without affectation or coyness, she put her arms around my neck, brought her beautiful face close while my senses swam.

"She said, among other things, what we already know, Penn," she said softly, "That we're in love with each other, terribly, dan-

gerously in love—"

"It's true!" I cried, crushing her slender body close to mine. She yielded to me with an abandon that had my head spinning. "I love you, Rhoda! I'm mad about you. Do you care enough to go through the scandal my divorce will be?"

"I care enough to go through anything!" she cried with a passionate intensity. "I want a real marriage, too, just as you do! I understand your misery about your failure with Lois, because I've been through the same thing. Oh, Penn, we'll be so happy!"

LOIS didn't wait for me to bring up the subject of a divorce. She brought it up herself only a short time later. It was a painful time, because once we'd been so in love and so young together. But both of us had changed. We weren't the boy and girl who hadn't been able to wait for marriage, who had been so eager to be together that nothing else mattered.

We parted polite friends, and Lois married Harley Riordon as soon as the decree came through. For the sake of my practice, I waited the full year, impatiently. My feverish blood clamored for Rhoda with an impatience hard to fight. But Rhoda was sane for both of us. She was even more discreet and conventional about our being seen together than before my divorce, and I respected her for it even while I suffered.

In the meantime, Ellen's cold aloofness infuriated me. She was capable and businesslike as ever, but the warm friendliness of our old relationship was gone.

Finally I burst out at her, "I suppose you'll be leaving me when I marry Rhoda next month. Ellen, you haven't tried to understand."

"I understand you're leaping from the frying pan into the fire," Ellen said quietly. "You're befuddled. God help you when you come to your senses, Penn. No, I'm not going to leave you, unless you fire me. I'm fool enough still to want you to succeed as a doctor, even if you fail every other way."

I studied her angrily. Rhoda had been wrong. These were not the words of a woman in love with me. Ellen just liked to boss me. It was almost like a mother complex!

Rhoda and I were married and I took an elaborate apartment for her. The white fire of Rhoda's love was all I had dreamed it would be. It was almost fiercely primitive; in it I seemed to lose my own identity. If this was happily disturbing, I told myself I was too happy to care.

I flung myself into working harder than ever to pay for the luxury of possessing a vivid, lovely creature like Rhoda for a wife. But I was completely stunned when she insisted on continuing at the receptionist's desk.

"It isn't necessary or even appropriate now, Rhoda," I argued.

"I think it's wholly appropriate," Rhoda said, her green eyes flashing in a way I was beginning to recognize. "Your work is as important to me as to you. I want to be near you and it, so that I'll understand completely."

She was immovable and I had to give in. There was a new firmness about Rhoda now that she was Mrs. Penn Fielding.

"From now on, we're going to encourage the wealthier patients, darling," she in-

formed me. "The rich old women who want an operation for the thrill of it, and the younger ones who have too much time on their hands and are bored. They'll pay a good price for your sympathetic understanding, my pet, now that I'm not only your bookkeeper but your partner."

And so she took my calls and regulated the flow of patients, and the kind. I had fewer patients, but my receipts increased.

I needed more and more money. For Rhoda was demanding and got what she wanted. She could be passionately yielding,

understood. I gave her credit for being more level-headed than she proved to be. I tried to be patient, to give her no reason for jealousy, but she found reasons, or rather manufactured them.

I was heartsick about it, but Rhoda grew worse instead of better. She began to insist on being present at every examination I made, and this was embarrassing, for this was Ellen's job. She possessed the knowledge and skill to help me, and Rhoda did not. It was ridiculous to have both of them present. Patients resented it too.

I was at my wit's end to know what to do. In the end, it was Ellen who suggested the solution.

"You had better get another receptionist and let Rhoda take over my work, Penn," she said calmly.

"But, Ellen," I sputtered, "I need you! Besides," I added lamely, "what would you do?"

I thought there was a faint flash of pity in Ellen's fine, dark eyes, but it was gone in an instant and I thought I must have imagined it when she answered brusquely, "Don't worry about me. I have plans."

So definitely did she put that wall of formality between us that I dared not ask what her plans were. I felt lonely and depressed with Ellen cutting herself off from me so decisively. She was so much a part of my life as a doctor.

Before I consented to give her up, I made one last appeal to Rhoda.

"Rhoda, let's build a home," I pleaded. "I can afford to now, and I've always wanted a place of my own. Surely you feel the same way. You would have plenty to keep you occupied and happy. I'd like to see you take your rightful place in the social life of the town. And I'd like—children—"

"You're trying to push me into the background of your life, Penn," she said tensely. "And I won't be put there! I won't be saddled with the care of a big house—"

Something like a cold wind blew over me. Lois had said this same thing once.

"And—children?" I asked carefully, forcing my voice to steadiness.

"In time," she said evasively. Then with animation, "Penn, darling, we must think about your hospital, plan toward that—"

I had the uncomfortable feeling that the hospital was a sop she threw me, a stopgap against my desire for a home and children of my own.

AND so Ellen left me, and the wrench was worse than I had feared it would be, although she herself was calm. I thought she had never looked prettier than the day she stopped in to say good-by. She looked younger somehow, her eyes bright, her clear brown complexion glowing. And she told me her plans!

"I'm opening a nurse's home, Penn. Will you send some patients my way? I've taken the old Walton house and am fixing it up. I think I can take a dozen patients, with three or four good assistants to help me."

I stared at her. In her own way, Ellen was going ahead toward something a little like what I had dreamed of.

"I envy you," I said. Then I pulled myself together, smiled and held out my hand. "Well, good luck, Ellen. I'll do all I can to help."

Her strong fingers returned the pressure of mine, her eyes were briefly dark and shining, her lips soft and not quite steady.

The Vanity Box

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but she could withhold herself, too, until she had things her way. I learned things about Rhoda I never dreamed of, during the early months of our marriage.

The greatest shock was finding out that she was intensely jealous! Every doctor knows that a large per cent of women patients pay their doctors an almost worshipful homage. With some of them, it is a sincere gratitude for help and relief from pain or fear. With others, those who are unhappy or maladjusted in their emotional life, it is something that must be handled delicately with sympathy and understanding, and yet impersonally. A doctor knows too much and sees too much and too clearly, in the case of most patients, to be seriously drawn to them in a romantic way.

All of which I could have sworn Rhoda

She was, for a moment, not the calm, self-possessed Ellen I had always known, but a girl, shy and emotion-shaken. And in that brief moment, I had a blinding glimpse of life the way it could have been, with Ellen who really knew me to the depths of my being, who had shared my youth and my dreams, who might have loved me. But that was ridiculous. She was just upset at severing our years of business relationship.

"Good-by, Penn," she said abruptly, and went out hurriedly.

Rhoda was delighted at the change. She engaged a plain, elderly but competent receptionist and glued herself to my elbow. And she was not the capable assistant Ellen had been. I missed Ellen every hour of the day, and went around often to see how her nursing home was coming along.

In two months she had things functioning smoothly, and I was able to send her several patients. Unofficially, I was the house physician of the Ellen Nursing Home. That part Rhoda didn't like much, but she didn't bother to be very jealous of Ellen.

It was my patients she concentrated on. But the cases I wanted were not coming my way. I wanted good surgery cases. I was getting tonsillectomies, appendectomies and a perfect epidemic of nervous maladjustments. I was deteriorating as a surgeon, and I knew it.

There were several sickeningly unpleasant occurrences, too, caused by Rhoda's jealousy. Jealousy is always an ugly thing, but I had never before known how it could change and corrode a person until I painfully watched the change in Rhoda. She was suspicious of every move I made, every word I uttered.

ONCE when she even went to Ellen and asked for a certain nurse's dismissal because she thought I might find her attractive, I was driven to demand angrily, "You're being ridiculous, Rhoda, making yourself and me a laughing stock. Why are you so suspicious? I've never given you reason—"

"You gave me reason before I married you," Rhoda said in a queer, tight voice. "You were in love with me before you divorced Lois. I'm no fool, Penn. What you've done once, you are capable of doing again. I'd kill anyone without a qualm who tried to come between us."

I had the strange, prickly feeling that she could! But she needn't worry, I thought wearily. I'd never be fooled again by any woman. I could make my work—almost—fill the aching lack I felt in my life.

Then a most interesting case came my way. She was a woman whose name would be known to every reader of these pages, a woman whose name is known from coast to coast as the author of more best sellers than any other writer in the country. Her name was not Elizabeth Martin, but I shall call her that.

She was a mature woman in her middle thirties, possessed of unusual beauty, but more than that, a warm, vivid personality. She was in Ellen's Nursing Home a month while I built her up for an extremely delicate operation, and she and Ellen and I became close friends.

Rhoda made it a point to know her, too, and during that month she startled and disgusted me by saying tensely, "That woman's in love with you, Penn. I want you to get her away the minute her operation is

over. I mean it. She's beautiful and brilliant—and dangerous."

This was so utterly ridiculous, and I'd heard this same thing from Rhoda about other patients, and was driven to exasperation.

"You'll end up in the psychopathic ward if you keep this insane jealousy up, Rhoda," I said sternly.

"No other woman is going to push me out of your life!" she cried passionately. "I know when—"

I refused to listen any longer to this foolish outburst. I was ashamed for Rhoda. Soul-sick and disillusioned, I buried myself in work more than ever.

ELIZABETH MARTIN'S operation was a complete success. Without it, she couldn't have lived. It was natural that she should feel deeply grateful. She stayed a month afterward at the nursing home, and Rhoda hovered about whenever I was there on my regular calls.

I was actually sorry the day Elizabeth came to my office, in Ellen's nursing home, to tell me good-by. Ellen was there, too, and we had both been stimulated by this extraordinary woman's friendship.

Elizabeth put both of her hands in mine. "There aren't words to tell you what I feel for what you've done for me," she said simply. "You've given me back my life. You're a splendid surgeon and a fine person. I'll always be glad I knew you."

All patients are not that gracious, or have not the words at their command to speak with such warm sincerity. I was stumbling with an almost embarrassed answer when a little inarticulate sound from Ellen jerked my head toward the door.

Rhoda was standing there, her face like paper, a distorted mask of furious jealousy, awful to see.

"I told you I'd see you dead first!" she cried hysterically, and I saw her right hand lift and something gleam—

In the next split second, all the ghastly mistakes of my whole life rose to a crescendo of bitter, useless tragedy. Before I could move, Ellen threw herself between us, shielding me with her body.

"You love him, too!" Rhoda screamed, as her gun spit twice and fell smoking from her fingers as she slumped to the floor.

I heard Elizabeth running, calling for help. Except for that, I knew nothing. I was kneeling with Ellen's limp body in my arms, my hands shaking, and cold sweat pouring out all over me as I unbuttoned her starched white uniform, across which a crimson stain was spreading. As my fingers touched her, Ellen opened her eyes slowly and said, "See if—Rhoda hurt herself—"

I swallowed hard.

"It's you, Ellen. I've got to take care of you. You're badly hurt. Ellen darling, for God's sake, hold on—don't slip away from me. We'll stop this bleeding, and then—"

"The bullet's still there," Ellen said through white lips. "Penn, I think I won't come through this. If I don't—"

"Don't say it!" I cried raggedly. "I'm the one who should have had the bullet, Ellen. I deserved it. Not you. Oh, Ellen, Ellen, if anything happened to you, I'd be through!"

She closed her eyes, suffering intensely, but she smiled, and I suddenly realized something that had been true Heaven alone knew how long. I knew that I loved Ellen,

that all the sad muddle of my life would never have happened if only I had been able to recognize this blinding truth years ago.

I loved Ellen. Without her, I couldn't face life. And now she lay at the point of death, and Rhoda was dead. Rhoda was tragically at the end of her bitter, passionate struggle with life. The stark irony of her useless sacrifice was pitiful.

But in the next half-hour I faced my most difficult test, and I thought I couldn't meet it. I quailed before the thought of removing that bullet from the edge of the lung above the heart of the woman I loved. In panic, I was hanging up after a futile call to Chicago for a specialist, when Elizabeth Martin came in again.

With rare understanding, she said quietly, "They're getting her ready for you, Penn. I've known for a long time how you and Ellen felt about each other. I think she'll be glad that you will be the one to save her life."

I buried my tortured head in my hands. "I can't do it," I wrenched out. "I love her. That's why I can't."

"That's why you have to," said Elizabeth gently. "You can't wait. Wharton has arrived to give the anaesthetic and stand by. I've heard you say yourself he's a good man. You can't let Ellen down."

"No," I said dazedly, passing a hand across my forehead. "I've let her down for years, disappointed her, hurt her twice pretty badly even though unconsciously—"

A nurse put her head in.

"Miss Todd is asking for you, Doctor," she said.

My heart lifted and sank. Elizabeth pressed my fingers strongly.

"You performed a miracle for me," she reminded me. "Now go and do the same for Ellen—and yourself."

ELLEN lay with her eyes shut, her face empty of color. Moving leadenly, I picked up her limp hand and she opened her eyes. They were dark with pain, but the quickening light in them brought me to my knees beside her bed, aching to gather her close and safe in my arms. Ellen who had been another part of me, most of my life!

"You didn't—let me finish something I wanted to say, Penn," she whispered. "Something I want to have—the joy of saying—before the light goes—"

"Ellen darling, the light isn't going!" I cried, putting my lips to her temple where the little smile lines were. "You were trying to save me. Can I do less for you?"

She spoke with her eyes shut. "Keep your lips there, Penn. I'd—like it to be—this way at the last."

"Ellen, you're breaking my heart!" I whispered brokenly. "Haven't you faith in me?"

"I love you," said this girl I had known all my life, and never really known. "That's what I wanted to say. It's always been true. Don't feel guilty because you can't feel the same way. I've known you never could. Don't feel badly, Penn."

"No one was ever a bigger fool than I," I said wretchedly. "We'll straighten this out when you're well, dear. Just now we have something of first importance. Dr. Wharton is here to help me."

A wistful smile touched her lips. "I've already had more than I ever expected,"

HOW TO PLAY WITH YOUR BABY

Without Spoiling Him

By Mrs. Martha Sloane

YOUR baby needs your companionship. Nature intended him to have it, and you should not let a fear of spoiling him rob him of it. Children under five learn chiefly from imitation, and if they are made to play too much by themselves, they tend to be backward.

The companionship of other children is necessary, too, but it will not entirely take the place of yours. You should play with your baby regularly, and if you do it in the right way, spoiling will not result. A few simple rules may help you.

(1) **DON'T DO FASCINATING THINGS WITH HIM WHICH HE CAN'T DO ALONE.** For instance, don't build a splendid castle in your small child's sand pile and then march off to do your work, leaving him feeling helpless. Do something instead which he can repeat after you've gone, like digging a hole and filling it with pebbles. Indoors, you might pile three or four blocks on each other and then take them down and say, "Now you do it!" Show him how to build walls and towers. But don't build them higher than he could, or he'll feel the game is unexciting without you.

(2) Except for an occasional demonstration or suggestion, **DON'T INSTRUCT HIM IN HOW TO PLAY.** Many parents take all the pleasure out of a new toy by insisting that their child use it in the "right" way. If you keep saying, "No, no. That's wrong. Do it this way," your child will soon feel inferior in connection with that toy, and will believe that he can't manage it without your help. What difference does it make whether he strings his wooden beads or simply runs the thread through and pulls it right out again? Does it really matter whether he rides his little velocipede or turns it upside down and spins the wheels? Once or twice a week you should show him the real purpose of these things. But let him work with them as he prefers.

(3) **DON'T INTERRUPT HIM AT ONE THING TO SUGGEST ANOTHER.** Most parents make this mistake. Little Bobby is contentedly burying his feet in his sand when Mother spies a heap of dry leaves. "Oh, look, darling!" she calls. "Let's play in those lovely leaves." But after a few minutes of watching him roll in and toss them, she gets bored and urges him to come and see the Smiths' big black dog. Bobby finds the dog more fascinating than Mother does, and once more she wants to move on before he is ready. She is teaching her child to be restless, and to be dependent on her suggestions. Soon she will hear the refrain, "Mamma, what can I do?"

Concentration is what you want your child to learn. Direct your ingenuity toward finding ways of prolonging his interest in what he is already doing. He will catch your spirit and seek new variations on familiar games rather than new things to do. His imagination will be stimulated and he will take pride in his discoveries.

The uppermost thought in your mind when you play with your baby should be, "What can I teach him which will increase his pleasure in playing by himself?"

she said oddly. "I have—complete faith in you, Penn. More than I've ever had."

If there was any skill in me, I wouldn't let Ellen die! I couldn't! I needed her, needed her in all the ways that a man can need a woman, a human being need another human being.

But no one knew better than I how my skill had deteriorated during the past years, under Rhoda's regulation of my patients, while I had weakly accepted the unimportant, petty cases she permitted me to take. Only my surgery on Elizabeth Martin a month ago had been anything like real and brilliant work.

That was the frame of mind into which I entered my battle for the life of the woman I loved. No ordeal in my lifetime ever put me to such strain and torture. The slow throb of Ellen's heart was under my hand as I probed, the heart that had loved me faithfully all these years when I had been so stupid and weak, so little worthy of her love. She lay helpless and barely alive, at the mercy of my frail human knowledge of surgery.

But I removed the bullet and Ellen survived. I didn't leave her for seventy-two consecutive hours, and there were times when I thought she would slip away in spite of all I could do.

The day of Rhoda's funeral, I was able to leave her long enough to attend that. I could only feel pity about Rhoda's tragic,

self-inflicted death. All her misery had been her own making, as so much of human misery is, but I had had my part in it. Perhaps if I had tried to save my marriage with Lois, none of this might have happened. But it was painful and useless to think of that now.

As Ellen left danger behind and began quickly getting back her strength, she seemed curiously reluctant about being alone with me. And finally when she had been dressed she said, "I'll go home now, till I'm strong enough to work again. I'm just taking up room another more urgent case might need."

"I'll take you home, and get a nurse to stay with you," I agreed.

"You won't need to come," Ellen said hurriedly. "Your other patients need you more than I do now."

"Ellen," I said, studying the sweet, serene face I had known so long yet never really seen until these last weeks, "I'll take you home myself. That will be best. I want to talk to you."

I took her in my car, and carried her into the house in my arms, putting her down gently on the davenport. She seemed inexpressibly precious to me as I sat in a chair close to her.

"Ellen," I said gently, "I shall need a surgical nurse again in my office, but I'll not ask you to come back—"

I saw her wince and whiten. I put out

a hand to cover hers, but she drew it away.

"Penn," she said starkly, "can't you forget what I said in a moment when I was practically delirious and expecting to die? I can't bear your pity."

"Let me tell you something, Ellen," I said slowly, "in one of the few moments of sanity I've had in a lifetime, and when I'm not expecting to die. I love you—and you'd better believe it."

"You're trying to save my face, my pride," said Ellen simply. "But I don't want your pity. If I can't have your love, I can be satisfied with your friendship as I've been all my life."

"Satisfied, Ellen?" I asked softly.

"No," she said, whitening. "I'm a woman clear through, Penn. I love you as a woman. I've been—more jealous than Rhoda, only it didn't take a violent outlet. When you married Lois, I thought I couldn't stand it. I was younger then, still fool enough to dream. When Rhoda came into the picture, I knew my role in your life was always to be—"

"That of picking up the pieces?" I asked ruefully. "They've never been such a hopeless, aching mess as they are now, Ellen. I need you desperately."

"You don't have to marry me for me to help you build up a life again," she said. "I'll stand by through all this gossip and unpleasantness about Rhoda's death—"

I drew a deep, unsteady breath.

"Ellen, how can I convince you!" I cried. "I love you! Not the headlong, youthful way I thought I loved Lois. Not the mad, reasonless way I desired Rhoda. But the way a man loves when he has fully grown up at last, come into his heart's maturity."

I knelt and gathered her close in my arms.

"I've been starved all my life without knowing till now you were the answer to my hunger," I whispered. "And I like to think you've felt the same way."

Then she put her soft cheek against mine and yielded with sudden dizzying sweetness to my arms.

"Oh, I have been, Penn!" she cried. "Hold me! Love me! Then I'll have no doubts—"

"Sweetheart," I asked a long time afterward, "what do you want most in the world? I want to give it to you. I want to make it all up to you!"

"I want what you want," said Ellen, smiling softly. "And nobody knows better than I what that is, Penn darling. First, your hospital. And we almost have it now. An operating room, some equipment—"

"And you to help me!" I cried excitedly.

"No," said Ellen, startling me. "You'll have to get along without me, Penn. I'm going to be busy, making you the home you've never had and always wanted. The world is full of good surgical nurses. But no one else can make you a home and—" she steadied her suddenly husky voice, and golden warmth came into it—"give you children, because I'm going to be the one to do that."

Through the heartbreak and tragedy of two marriages, I have come to this heaven. It's nothing less than that. I'm one of the lucky ones, and I have the sense to know it and to thank God. It isn't everybody who gets another chance, as I have. I'll always be a little humble before the miracle of Ellen's love.

They Expected the Worst of Me

(Continued from page 19)



represented. When I tossed her my bridal bouquet and hugged her in tearful good-bye, she choked, "I'll do better than Chad. I'll get millions, maybe a title. You needn't think you're so wonderful."

"I don't," I laughed, "only the luckiest girl in the world."

It was a wrench to leave Mother, and I felt a pang, too, when my high school beau, Jerry Dane, kissed my cheek. Jerry was handsome in a clean-cut, scrubbed fashion, and I knew he'd counted on marrying me when he became owner of the Premier Garage and Repair Shop. But before Chad's tempestuous love-making, everything was dried leaves before a forest fire.

I adored Chad, but discovered that isn't enough to put marriage on a sound foundation. He introduced me into a queerly empty peacock life—dressing up, drinking, flinging money about like paper chips and kisses—his or other men's! New Year's was every day, with a diet of champagne and hooters and diamond pins popping out of gardenia corsages.

Chad's growing complaint, "Don't act like a hick prude, Helen," one day changed to, "My God, you'll get rid of the kid. Do you hear? I want a wife, not an unwieldy hausfrau!"

He was drunk, of course, and when my little pink rose of a Sophie arrived, had the grace to be proud. But Sophie and her nurse were installed in a wing of the Lake Shore duplex, and as soon as possible, I had to take up my role of super show girl to display my husband's flair for exotic clothes and furs and jewels.

I still loved Chad, but sometimes my thoughts turned wistfully to the quiet town where Mother and Wilma and I had time to live and Jerry's gray eyes glowed when the till showed a ten-dollar increase.

Wilma and Jerry had become engaged. She wrote, "We're spending twice what Jerry figured on the house. But why shouldn't I have something too?"

I believe Wilma could have filled Chad's demands better than I. She'd have enjoyed the flattery of envious women and promiscuous men. Chad wasn't particularly adult. The fact that other men desired me was fuel to his pride of ownership. How ironical that this very weakness should have precipitated disaster!

Chad came in drunk and found one of his easygoing friends forcing fierce, unwelcome kisses onto my mouth. Chad didn't stop to see that I was fighting the man off. He lurched forward and, with one powerful up-thrust of his fist, cracked Mike's neck back and sent him spinning onto the iron fire-guard.

Before the judgment of manslaughter could be passed, before Chad's family could gather its powerful financial strength to his support, Chad rashly ended things with a bullet, finishing his life as hectically as he'd lived it.

The horror of that climax, the anguished regrets, and the knowledge that if Chad could have faced the consequences, the lesson might have swung our lives onto a sane

footing—all this swamped my personal danger. I was too dazed to combat the legend growing up about me, that I was a loose woman driving her adoring husband to murder! I was the little girl from nowhere, who lived like a queen out of Aladdin's pages; the mother who took no interest in her child, drove her husband to liquor while she indulged in promiscuous love!

The scandal was a bath of slime. I had no weapons to fight its vicious half-truths. All I thought of was rushing away from the limelight with my baby. My story was juicy meat for the tabloids. I didn't expect Chad's father to be so fair. Through his influence, I was allowed to have Sophie. I accepted enough money to take care of us till I could earn a living.

Could I find again the girl I had been before the rotogravures and scandal sheets had flung my face, my clothes, and every detail of my marriage into the gawking arena?

Mother would help me! But she was much older—was it from the effect of my father's death or my notoriety? She seemed shaky, didn't want to hear about my trouble.

"I know, Helen, but why rehash? It's all been a shock to you—and us."

"But you can't believe those lies?"

"Of course not. It's just—"

Wilma told me about Mother's heart. "I had to beg Dr. Thomas before he'd consent to your coming here."

I gripped her shoulders. "But it's my home, Wilma. You don't think—"

"Smoke must mean fire somewhere," she observed cruelly. "You certainly weren't discreet."

IT WAS a comfort to experience Jerry Dane's welcome. He caught me on the porch, taking Sophie in to bed. His face lit up. "My, it's swell to see you home. As beautiful as ever, Helen!"

Jerry believed in me still! With a pang I realized what I'd missed. After the first, exciting infatuation, what had marriage to Chad really brought me?

Wilma, dressed to go out, discovered us laughing over Sophie's antics. That night she delivered her ultimatum. Her face was chalk-white. Her eyes blazed. "I'll thank you to keep your hands off Jerry. He's engaged to me now. Chicago may stand for such methods, but I warn you Trexford won't."

"Wilma, stop! There's nothing between Jerry and me."

Her mouth tightened. "It's no use pretending that mud doesn't stick, Helen. It nearly killed Mom. That's why Aunty Grace is to live here when I get married next month. Mom needs care."

I choked. "I can look after Mother."

"If Trexford interests you that long, which I doubt. Honestly, I don't believe you'd ever be happy here, Helen. People talking and—"

What I didn't know then was that Wilma herself was fanning every little whisper, keeping them alive by half denials. It wasn't from malicious intent, I know now, but to

ease the ugly resentment and jealousy that bit so deep. Wilma had a sick soul. She didn't realize why she hated me. But life isn't over at twenty-two. There had to be more for me. I'd show Trexford, show everyone!

Jerry came one night when Mother was in bed and Wilma having a permanent. He pushed past me into the living room. And suddenly I was in his arms, a sweet rush of happiness pulsing through my veins. I fought Jerry, struggled against the savage bliss storming through my empty heart.

This was a new Jerry, all fierce excited male, whispering that he couldn't live without me. He'd been a fool to let another man snatch me from him. We'd shake Trexford. Wilma had never really meant anything.

I felt weak before the burning desire in his eyes. I beat my fists against him. "Jerry, no, no! We can't do this to her."

Heaven knows if my pleas would have availed, or what craziness that night might have ended in, if Wilma's appointment hadn't fallen through. She flung the door open. The three of us were figures in a nightmare.

Everything I said was worse than nothing. Wilma worked up a scene that brought Mother panting downstairs. "Nothing but a cheapie!" Wilma shrieked. "Isn't it enough for her to drive her own husband to murder and play fast and loose with her own immoral crowd? Why does she have to come back here among decent—"

"Wilma, you'll make yourself ill," Mother begged.

I was terrified by the blue look around Mom's mouth. Why didn't Jerry say something? While Wilma sobbed, I brought Mother brandy. The horrible names Wilma had flung at me quivered in the air, burned into my eardrums. But worse still was the fact that Mom shrank from my touch as I held the glass to her lips.

Wilma sobbed that she wouldn't live in the same house to be smeared. I looked at Jerry, silent, scarlet-faced. Could it be that Jerry had changed, didn't love me, thought of me only as an easy mark, cheap?

Something froze in my heart. Even Jerry! Mother loved me, but it was awkward having me around, despite the comforts my money provided. When Jerry had gone, Mother said, "It isn't kind, Helen, when you know how Wilma loves Jerry."

A stab shot through me. Then the ice closed down again. I went to Wilma, bleakly staring into the yard. "I'm sorry I brought you all this unhappiness. You'd better know—it wasn't Jerry's fault. I asked him to come tonight. He didn't want my kisses."

The Turning Point Of My Life

MAN-HATER

THIS is my ugly duckling," Mother would say, introducing me to strangers when I was small.

In Mother's mind, ugly ducklings turned into beautiful swans; I only heard I was ugly. It made me abnormally shy and sensitive.

My two pretty older sisters married when I was in high school, had homes of their own, and I wanted that, too.

I hadn't turned into a swan. I still had sandy hair and freckles. But one day a boy walked home from school with me. I was so happy I could hardly talk to him. With no encouragement, I fell madly in love. I invited him to dinner, took him riding in Father's car, followed him about at school. In less than two weeks, he was avoiding me.

This, with variations, was the history of three other crushes I had during my school days. I knew I was pursuing the boys, frightening them off, but I couldn't help it.

Shamed and humiliated by my experiences, I began to hate men.

I became a nurse and it pleased me to see men at their worst. I was crisp and efficient, and soon had a line that squelched the most obstreperous male. I was often sent on cases no other nurse could handle. My contempt for men grew.

I was twenty-four, and had never been kissed, when my aunt in another city sent for me.

She was dying from an incurable disease. Yet from her bed, she cheerfully ran a boarding house. More than that, she mothered everyone in it and cared for an orphan niece, Marie.

Her bright old eyes studied me, and soon she began a gentle attack on my attitude toward men.

One day, showing me her wedding picture, she said, "Homely, wasn't it? Yet Joe; thought I was good-looking. Remember, Nancy, every woman is beautiful to some man."

"Thanks, Auntie," I replied, laughing, "but I'm happy without a man. I've seen too much. I despise them all."

"Nonsense!" she retorted. "No woman is happy without love."

A young man lived in the house—handsome, cocky—the kind girls chase after. I detested the type, snubbed him. When he asked me to go driving with him one Sunday, I refused. Then Auntie was so distressed about it, I went to please her. It became a regular thing.

They were unpleasant rides. I suspected Auntie had engineered them, and felt that Tom was uncomfortable

and didn't enjoy being alone with me.

One morning word came that Tom had been killed in an automobile crash on his way to work. It was a shock to all of us that his sparkling life was over.

That afternoon Auntie and I were alone, and talk turned to Tom.

"Was there any special girl?" I asked.

"Yes, there was," she said at last. "Didn't you know?"

From the drawer of her bedside table, she took a tissue-wrapped package, put it in my hand.

"I was keeping it for him. It was to have been your birthday present."

It was a necklace—a silver chain with an enormous carved green stone—ornate, ugly.

As I looked up, puzzled, she said, "It belonged to Tom's mother."

Tom's mother, whose memory he'd revered! And he'd intended this for me! Why, he must have liked me—no loved me! I couldn't quite grasp it. I recalled the way I'd treated him, when all the time he was in love with me. And now it was too late!

"Why didn't you tell me?" I cried, tears flooding my eyes.

"I was waiting for you to tell me," she said.

Thinking back, I remembered times when Tom's eyes had softened, when he'd started to speak, then changed his mind; times when I'd stopped his words with sarcasm. He could have had his choice of dozens of pretty girls. Yet he'd loved me.

Weeks passed, but I couldn't forget him. I'd take out the necklace, fondle it, dream of what might have been, had he lived.

Then Auntie died, and I went back to the world again. I was changed, for I no longer hated men. I tried to make up to them for what I'd done to Tom, giving them sympathy, kindness, understanding. I forgot about my appearance, comforting myself that Tom had found me desirable in spite of it. Men began to like me, to take me out.

More than a year later, I fell in love and was married.

My second baby was a month old, when Auntie's niece Marie came to see me. We were looking over some keepsakes Auntie had left me, when I happened upon the now tarnished necklace.

"So Auntie did give that to you, after all!" she exclaimed. "She was so mysterious about it. I picked it out for your birthday present from her, then she sent me for handkerchiefs instead. She said I must never mention it again, not even if I saw it somewhere."

"You bought it?" I gasped.

"Yes. I thought it was the nicest thing I could get for a dollar."

My whole world rocked. Auntie had lied! Tom hadn't loved me after all—and all these years I'd been cherishing a dream that hadn't existed! Oh, what a fool I'd been to believe it!

And then I remembered my husband, my babies. A wave of thankfulness washed over me as I realized that if Auntie hadn't made me believe that one man had cared for me, I'd have gone on hating men, driving them from me, and I never would have known as I did now, that even a homely woman is beautiful to the man who loves her.

She looked at me. The awful misery was gone from her eyes. Oh, if my lies would buy her happiness and make her relent a little! I told her I was going away.

I didn't rest till I'd got myself a file clerk's job in a chemical works, out of town a little on the other side of Treford. I agreed to let Mother look after Sophie till I could get settled in a small apartment and find a suitable nurse.

It was a comfort to lose my identity, become plain "Miss West" on a huge pay roll. I wasn't invited to Wilma's wedding, though she didn't refuse the chest of silver I bought her. That was generous of Wilma. I realized it hadn't been easy for her. She was sensitive, and scandal doesn't leave anyone unscathed.

Surely she'd be content now with her imposing house on Abbott's Boulevard, her sporty car, and maid to open the door to afternoon visitors. I could see Mother was a little worried. Jerry was a full partner in the garage, but even a successful repair shop doesn't bring in a fortune.

Still, the Danes must hold their own at six-o'clock cocktail parties, exhibit every sign of success. Wilma could patronize only the small, ultra-exclusive dress stores. The bills were Jerry's headache.

"How's the wage slave?" Wilma sailed in on Mother and me one Saturday afternoon. A new mink coat I'd never seen was draped across her shoulders. A wave of expensive perfume enfolded her. A man I didn't know and two other women, even better dressed, followed.

She introduced, "Meet Mrs. Nedwick, the swellest mom a girl ever had, and my cousin who quixotically chooses to see life from a new angle—elevator girl or something in a factory. How do you feel when the whistle blows you out of bed, Helen?"

"Fine," I laughed. "I happen to be working in the laboratory, promoted to typist now, Wilma."

"Isn't she quaint, folks? A year ago the most envied siren in—"

"Wilma," Mother reproved. "I'd like to be properly introduced to your friends."

Upstairs in our old bedroom, Wilma warned, "I hope you won't want to do some horning in on my success."

"Need we be enemies?" I begged. "Really, Wilma, I want you and Jerry to be truly successful and happy. I hope you'll have children."

She swung round, scarlet-cheeked. "If I do, they'll bear no smear on their name. No one can point at me."

"I know, I know. Don't work yourself up." I was beginning to lose patience. "It isn't intelligent to go on hauling out ancient history that concerns you or me."

She nodded. "You're right. I've got to keep calm. Why doesn't Jerry appreciate my friends?" she demanded. "Just because he likes eating in his shirt sleeves—"

"Oh, Wilma, that's not Jerry."

"All he does is harp on money till I'm crazy. He thinks I should manage on his filthy budget! He can't stand Laura Grice—that swell blonde downstairs talking to Mom. Why? Because Laura insists I go to the best stores. She knows it's for Jerry's good, too, to get us somewhere. Laura's lucky. Her doddering old father-in-law is a near-millionaire and generous. At fifty-nine, Hume Grice is a lot more fun than Jerry at twenty-six. I'll tell you."

"Jerry slaves for you, Wilma. Give him

time. When he gets a chain of places—if you help him now—”

“Oh, so I can wait till I’m a hundred? Thanks! Did you? I want a real home and some sort of a life. I want a stuffed jewel case like the one you returned to the vaults in Chicago. I’m not going to be trapped here forever. Why should I, where the Nedwick name’s mud!”

So she hated me still! I could guess what sort of a hell Jerry lived in. I had thought Wilma would be content, now that our roles were so dramatically reversed. And what was that she was hinting about Hume Grice? He owned the First Bank of Treford and blocks of business and apartment property. But he had a wife, a fragile woman with a wonderful record of charities. Yet to Wilma, Grice was “fun”!

Well, she’d never listen to my advice. Yet I wanted her to be happy. I had succeeded in stifling out most of the old bitterness in my heart. It hadn’t been easy, but I’d discovered the trite truth that a job from eight to five helps. I had the joy of watching my chubby little daughter grow more interesting each day.

AND, too, a man was teaching me how life can be lived. Jim Gort was a brilliant research chemist in the works; a quiet, sensitive man. The night he took me home to meet his parents, I made him listen to my story. We sat in his home workshop, among the familiar test tubes and retorts, with all the carefully labeled bottles. (My job in the lab.)

Jim tried to stop me. “Helen dear, I’ve heard rumors. But the past isn’t particularly interesting.”

“Please Jim, if we’re to be friends—” When I’d finished, my brow was wet with the strain, and I was shaking. I’d let him have it, heartbreak and all. It was going to mean an awful lot if Jim couldn’t understand. I’d been building hopes. I was young and healthy, with all the normal desires of youth for a full, rich life.

Jim’s penetrating brown gaze, the feeling in his voice, the contagious optimism of his outlook that had braced me so—how could I lose these? It was heaven to hear his calm decision. “Now that’s off your chest, there’s no need to bother with it ever again, is there? You know I love you, Helen.”

Our wedding was simple, one Sunday afternoon in the flower-decked Gort home. The bride’s guests were Mother, Aunt Grace, and Wilma. With Jim’s hand on mine, I was ready to love the whole world until—I turned from serving Aunt Grace some wedding cake and punch to see Wilma toasting the bridegroom. She looked like a bride herself in a long, creamy lace gown, purple orchids on her shoulder outvying the amethyst clips in her ears. She was meeting Jim for the first time and registering highest approval.

Suddenly the sun drained from the shabby, comfortable room and happiness ebbed from my heart. Wilma’s face thrust up to Jim’s, her eager mouth tempting! I knew, as clearly as if the challenge were flung in words, that every success of mine Wilma would begrudge. She wouldn’t rest till the crystal joy was tarnished.

“Oh, God, don’t let her touch Jim!” I prayed.

“Congratulations!” Wilma’s white arms slipped up onto Jim’s shoulder, her lips pressed his in a kiss. Under the lace, the

exquisite curves of her perfect shape were clearly displayed. She’d never known a man like Jim; handsome as Jerry, with deep emotions under iron control, all the more exciting for the tight reins he held.

Jim’s voice pulled me back from the dizzy precipice of fear. “Darling, what about that coat? Time we lost these people. Hurry, sweet.”

Jerry’s uncle, an architect, insisted we move into one of his new small homes on Abbott’s Boulevard. They were dreamlike places, perfectly detailed but horribly close to Wilma’s imposing stucco villa.

I started to protest, but couldn’t find it in my heart to dampen Jim’s enthusiasm. I reminded myself that Wilma’s first interest was money. Jim’s income was small and he had no ambitions at all for a social life. With a little care, our lives needn’t become tangled with Wilma’s. They mustn’t!

Jim and Sophie found each other perfect company. Later there’d be other babies. Nothing could mar our happiness. But I hadn’t counted on the dark streak of envy that motivated so much of my cousin’s life. Wilma wasn’t able to stir a ripple of desire in me by flaunting her de luxe house, her smart friends. I knew how lucky I was.

So Wilma mapped her campaign, overrode all my objections to constant four-somes. Jim and I must be on hand to admire her endless stream of revealing evening gowns. Poor Wilma! Jim was more interested in the lab he’d fitted up in our basement. Sophie and I filled his heart.

I had my fears, for Wilma was an exquisite, predatory animal, alluring and unscrupulous. To flaunt my husband’s scalp would ease the bitter twist in her soul. There was a complication, though, on which she hadn’t counted. It wasn’t good for Jerry to have me forced on him as a companion.

I could see, as Wilma spread her seductive net for Jim, that she planned to torment Jerry because he couldn’t tear his eyes from me and every movement betrayed the fact he hadn’t got over his first love. When it did penetrate into Wilma’s brain that to Jim she’d never be more than a cute little gadabout cousin to be teased, she trimmed her sails to a new wind.

Then she started little stabbing hints that built up an exaggerated picture of my life with Chad in Chicago. She insisted how dearly she and Mom loved me, despite everything.

I’ll never forget that night Wilma and Jerry stopped in for a nightcap after the country club dance. She stubbed her cigarette, trailed across the room and twisted the radio dial. “Dance, Jim? Jerry obviously wants to be allowed to sit and hold Helen’s hand. They were madly in love once, you know. Poor little Wilma was a rebound when Helen went away to work the diamonds and caviar out of her system. Too little green birds, cooing on a perch. Look at them!”

The soft pink tulle gown, as she leaned over Jim’s chair, revealed flawless alabaster throat and bosom.

Jim rose. “You’re drunk, my chicken. Stewed and not at all funny.”

Wilma pouted. “Well, look at my husband. If you think it’s fun for me—”

I knew Jim was angry, but he refused to show it. “Wake up, you silly little doll.” He gave her cheek a playful slap. “Beauti-



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ful but silly!"

The action set Wilma on fire. Jim looked stunned as she literally threw herself into my husband's arms, pressed an impassioned kiss on his lips. There was brute strength in Jim's fingers. I saw the skin twist on Wilma's wrists.

Jim's voice cut. "Pull yourself together. To me, Helen will always be tops. And don't bother to talk lies, Wilma. Above all, don't let me find you spreading gossip. If you're interested, Helen gave me every single detail before we were even engaged. It hasn't made a particle of difference to our love. Jerry, my advice is to get Wilma to bed with a sedative. If that doesn't put sense in her, there are other means. The kid's drunk, or—"

IT really seemed Jim's words had effect. From that night on, Wilma changed. She began to run in and out of my kitchen for cake recipes, to beg advice when she imagined she was pregnant. "Jerry and I have missed so much," she confessed.

I was willing to go three-quarters of the way to meet Wilma. If she was serious about wanting a baby, wouldn't that take the place of all the cocktail parties? At least, it would keep her from dashing around with older, thrill-seeking men like Laura Grice's father-in-law.

It wasn't so good, though, when Wilma began sending Jerry 'round later to pick up things she'd forgotten—her purse or a magazine article. Jim worked evenings in the lab downstairs. He was busy with defense research and occasionally had to fly to Washington overnight.

Jerry, I found, was only too eager to drop down in front of my fire for a cup of coffee and a chat. "It's so peaceful, Helen. Been a helluva day for me. Wilma's out anyway."

It wasn't wise, letting him come here to thrash out his business problems, for Jerry hadn't ceased to love me. His eyes and his reaching hands betrayed it.

One night he kissed me. I was conscious only of blinding pity as I pushed him away. It was annoying. Had Jim seen the clumsy embrace? I listened to his loud stamping on the basement steps and my heart dropped. Was Jim warning us?

He showed nothing and I decided explanations might awaken doubts. There'd be no more visits alone with Jerry though!

When Jim was called to Washington for a six-day chemists' convention, Wilma begged me to stay with her. "Let Sophie go to her grandma. She's always asking to have her. I feel so rotten, Helen. I'm sure this time it's not a false alarm. I nearly die mornings, and now my wretched maid's deserted me. I do need you."

So I walked into the neatest little trap ever laid. Wilma wasn't expecting a baby, I soon learned. She was spinning like a top, getting to bed at three most mornings, not rising till noon.

I tried to shake off the feeling that I was a crazy fool to be here, under Wilma's roof. The first night of my visit she asked, "You wouldn't mind, Helen, if I kept a bridge date? I can't wiggle out. I'll be back before Jerry comes in. He's delivering a car over to Don's Ferry and can't possibly get here till midnight. I'll be in bed long before eleven, so you've nothing to worry about. My table wouldn't forgive me if I disappointed them."

SHOPPING HINTS

On Buying Shoes

There's no such thing as "an expensive foot."

An expensive shoe may give you better wear, but it won't necessarily give you better fit. The fit of a shoe depends on the care with which it is fitted. You can use that same care in buying a \$3.98 shoe as a \$12.98 one.

Examine your old shoes to get good fit in your new ones.

If the sole is worn thin close to the tips, if the back of the heels is rundown, your shoes were too short. If they're stretched out of shape, it was because they were originally too narrow. Insist on a size long enough and wide enough, and you'll get better wear as well as more comfort.

Stand up when you're deciding on new shoes.

Your feet may be the flexible kind that spread as you stand on them—and the shoe that fits perfectly when you are seated may become an instrument of torture when you stand up.

Your feet indicate whether or not you need arch supports.

Calluses on the balls of your feet and muscular pains through the arch indicate weak arches. You can buy shoes with built-in supports—or you can buy arch supports as an "extra."

Consider the weight of your body when you're deciding on the cut of your shoes.

Cut-out sandals, pumps that aren't built up on the sides, shoes that consist largely of straps, are not intended to support weight in excess of the average young girl's. The smartly cut oxford, the built-up pump, the substantial shoe, is the right shoe for the heavy woman or for the one who does much walking. There is no sight less lovely than a foot bulging thickly in a flimsy shoe that is too light to control the foot.

Memorize the names of the manufacturers who make your shoes.

Manufacturers have different lasts. They may be equally good, but you will find one that is better for your foot than all the others. Once you have found it, most of your shoe buying troubles are over.

If your feet are exceptionally tender, avoid heavy leathers.

Calf and suede are pretty and practical—but they are not so porous as a light kid, and therefore warmer; it's the "warm" shoe that induces perspiration, foot-swelling, and tenderness. If you have foot trouble, a soft kid is your best bet for a shoe.

Economize on evening shoes—but don't on shoes for daily wear.

The shoes that bear the brunt of hard daily wear must be sturdy, well-made, and as good as you can afford. Your evening shoes can be pretty without being expensive.

Your shoes will give you better service if—

you break them in by wearing them around the house before you go out in them . . . you alternate your shoes, so that you have a daily change . . . you keep them polished . . . you don't let heels get run-down . . . you have soles repaired as they need it . . . you keep them on shoe-trees in a place where they won't get dusty or scuffed.

I didn't like it, but it seemed ridiculous to kick up an actual fuss. I squelched an instinctive longing to clear out at once instead of waiting till morning. Again the prod came, when I picked up a news clipping that had fallen out of the bureau drawer.

"Fay Grice, fifty-eight, beloved wife of Hume Grice—"

Why had Wilma bothered to cut out a notice of Mrs. Grice's death and funeral services in Indianapolis? Her considerable estate was left to her husband, the report stated.

Nothing particularly sinister here. Mrs. Grice had been ailing for some time. Her husband hadn't allowed that fact to stand in the way of his good times, but—

"At fifty-nine, Hume Grice is a lot more fun than Jerry at twenty-six!" Wilma had said. Of course, men with ailing wives do step out the world over. Unlimited funds don't hamper their style.

I was just on edge, I decided, letting the item bother me. I certainly would go home the very first thing in the morning.

I don't know what time it was when a shrill peal of the back doorbell jerked me out of bed. For a minute I didn't know where I was. I began pulling on my thin robe. The back door! Couldn't be Wilma. Probably meant Jerry had forgotten his key. Why couldn't Wilma get up and let him in?

I rapped on her bedroom door and waited. "Wilma! Are you awake, Wilma?" The bell still pealed. Slowly I turned the handle and called into the darkness, "Wilma, that must be Jerry at the back door. He's probably forgotten his key."

Suddenly the light switched on and Jerry sprang out of the tumbled bed. "Helen! What are you doing here? And what's all the row?" Dazed with sleep, he half fell over me, clutching my robe to save himself from falling.

THAT'S the tableau we presented when Wilma, Laura Grice, and two young men swept through the front hall and gawked up the staircase.

Wilma's perfect portrayal of the outraged wife was probably the most superb bit of acting of her whole life. I couldn't guess why Jerry put up such a poor fight, until I realized that all he wanted was to be rid of Wilma and actually hoped that one day I would marry him.

Wilma went away quietly to divorce her husband, but everyone in town knew I was the cause. Nor was it considered particularly strange. Wasn't I that Helen Nedwick, whose first marriage ended so disastrously?

"Sure," gossip ran, "her husband killed a man and then himself. Why? Don't you know? Rotten through and through. Helen Nedwick! Notorious! Gosh, how she dares show her face in Trexford!"

I wouldn't have, but for Jim. He believed in me. Oh, it seems insane and impossible. I know he thought I'd been indiscreet, flirted, but no more. Even under pressure from his own parents; even, for a time, against the earnest advice of his boss, Jim decided to stand by me. He refused to sue for divorce.

I know my own mother didn't quite trust me. She advised me to go away, leave Sophie with her. "You haven't a chance in Trexford, Helen, with two scandals against you. I know dear—I know! But

you've got to admit that circumstances looked black. Girls just can't afford to allow their names to be smeared. I want you to be happy. I believe in you. But Trexford isn't the place—at least not for these next few months."

"If I leave, they'll say I've gone to Jerry," I told her. "He's sold out and is starting again in Chicago. No, I can't run away, Mother."

"Just till the whole thing fades out, Helen, and Trexford forgets," she pleaded. "You'll never be able to live it down if you stay now!"

"It isn't Trexford. It's Wilma—all of it."

"Darling, hush! I can't bear to have you grow bitter, Helen."

So I faced Jim. "It's no good. I'll only hurt you if I stay." In answer to the question in his brown eyes, I added, "It is lies, Jim. You can trust me. But, dear, it's going to hurt you having me here."

"Not a thousandth part as badly as if you left. We'll see this campaign through together, Mrs. Gort."

TWO people who love each other marooned on their island of faith! It wasn't easy. Jim was too brilliant for the chemical works to let him go, but a good few of his friends cut him off.

Jim's verdict was, "Good! Now we know who our real friends are. And now, let me really get down to work in that downstairs lab of mine."

Certainly for a year there were few social interruptions. A little stir came at the end of six months, when Wilma became Mrs. Hume Grice, mistress of a home set in a ten-acre park. How brilliantly she'd made her moves, taking advantage of each twist! Was she happy? Had the old scar gone at last, the bitter inferiority that had made her take cruel revenge on me?

No, she couldn't be jealous now. Every notable who came to Trexford visited in her home. Her suppers were fuel for the ladies' page, as were her European chef, wine cellar, and every stitch she wore. That was the work of exclusive dressmakers, also a husband, thirty-five years older, who jumped to obey her whims.

For over a year Wilma seemed satisfied, and then even Hume Grice's fortune felt the pinch of defense demands and adjustments. Perhaps Wilma tired of her orgy of spending or was genuinely puzzled to discover why Jim had stuck by me. Maybe she remembered, one empty night, that my husband was young and attractive and we'd managed to wrest from life a prize that she, with all her scheming, lacked.

I returned from a visit to Mother's to find Wilma's limousine at the gate. The light in the basement led me downstairs. My husband's voice seemed strangely cold, coming up to me.

"No, I don't flatter myself it's that, Wilma. This is just another idea of yours to hurt Helen."

"But I do love you, Jim," she cried. "I'll do anything. If it's money you want for your experiments, I can give it to you. Only let me come here and see you. It's so lonely up there with an old man who watches every move. He's mean, jealous. I'm afraid. He carries that gun everywhere since police gave him permission after he was robbed. He thinks I—"

"You'd better get back right away. You're

taking a ridiculous chance, coming down here alone. What if he found—"

"I wanted to see you, Jim."

"Wilma, won't you ever learn, you little idiot? I love Helen. Get that through your head. If you've got to find a stooge, there are less busy men."

I opened the door. Wilma looked older, more brittle, but still beautiful. Her eyes blazed in a chalk-white face.

"Hello, darling," Jim said calmly. "Ready to drive Wilma back with me?" Jim simply refused to take Wilma's protestations seriously.

But, returning on the bus, he wasn't so calm. "I won't stand for her interfering in your life again. Yet, I'm sorry for the poor kid. It's my shrewd guess, Helen, she's taking dope. Her eyes and movements indicate it. You can see now that nothing in the world will ever satisfy her."

"Jim, I'd better go to her—and see if I can't help," I stammered.

"No, my darling. You can't do anything. The Wilma Nedwicks of this world have to steer their own wild course. You belong to me, Helen, and I'm not going to have you drawn into a hornet's nest."

Perhaps I would have gone up to the Grice home, despite Jim. The pace Wilma had set for herself was devastating. I knew she was miserable. But then she was brushing past me, one night, whirling down to the basement lab without pretense of apology. She rushed straight for Jim, screaming out hysterically that someone was following.

Jim was furious. For one thing he was in the middle of an experiment, a beaker of purple liquid bubbling over his Bunsen flame. Wilma almost upset the whole structure as she grabbed him, knocking over a scaffolding of glass retorts and piping.

"I've told him about you, Jim!" she screamed. "So I can't go back." She beat her clenched fists on his breast. "I want you to save me."

Jim's eyes met mine over Wilma's head, then passed beyond through the open door. Wilma looked back as Hume Grice stepped into the laboratory, his left hand stuck in his pocket. "Now you can see," she panted, her eyes filled with terror.

"I've come to take you home, Wilma. I'm not angry, but you must come at once. You're not well." Mr. Grice's voice was as calm as Jim's.

WILMA laughed and, swift as a hawk, picked up the bubbling beaker and tossed it full into the face of her gray-haired husband. It was the unexpectedness, I know, the automatic contraction caused by the scorching agony of the burn, that made Hume Grice's forefinger spring the trigger of the hidden gun in his pocket. He hadn't meant to shoot Wilma, only frighten her.

That night Wilma died in the hospital. Jim's evidence cleared Mr. Grice. I found I couldn't hate Wilma. Every step she'd tried to beat me, but lost out horribly, following the cruel urge to prove her superiority, snatch my treasures. Could she have fought against the deep-rooted bitterness? Oh, couldn't we, somehow, have made her understand?

Jim and Sophie and I have so much. It's the happiest part of my life now, living quietly in this little town near Washington. All I ask for is for life to go on being this way.

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I Forced Him to Choose

(Continued from page 17)

vow we'd just taken. They'd made our love seem tawdry and shameful, and today they'd taken us before a judge, and it was ended.

Oh, the Fentons were smart. They told Mark they forgave me for my outbursts against them, and a week later, on the day he was to start back for his last year at college, they let us say good-bye. They let us have a whole half-hour together, thirty minutes instead of a lifetime!

I flung myself into Mark's arms as soon as his parents left the room. I knew once more the feel of his lips against mine, the hard ache of his arms around me. It made the nightmarish agony of our last meeting completely disappear. When he held me away, he looked older, graver.

"Ginny," he said huskily, "let's show them we can take it. I'll finish college in a year and get a job. They'll let us remarry then. They've promised me."

"All right, Mark," I agreed, trying not to antagonize him.

But suddenly I couldn't keep still. "No, Mark, they're lying to you, trying to make you think they're so generous and fine. Once we're apart, they'll never let us see each other again."

"Wait, Ginny," he said reprovingly. "It's no good acting rebellious and bitter. You've got to see their side. I owe my father and mother a lot, and I feel like a heel for making them so unhappy."

"Then you're sorry—"

"No," he said quickly, "I want you so much that just holding you close is an agony for me. But I guess we were wrong, Ginny—wrong to let our love carry us away. We should have waited. We thought marrying would fix everything, but it hasn't. We can't fight them any more. Let's try to see things their way."

"All right," I said faintly. "A year isn't forever. We'll have our letters, Mark, and I can come and see you."

MARK swallowed. "No Ginny. You mustn't come to see me. We mustn't write either. It would only upset us both and keep me from studying. Besides, I promised Mother we wouldn't."

"I see." I stood very still. The sun slanting through the Venetian blinds made bars around us on the rug. I said suddenly, "You're in prison again, aren't you, Mark, and your mother and father are still the jail keepers? You escaped them once in my arms. You found out what it was to love and be loved. You came alive and dreamed dreams of what you wanted to do, not what your father wanted." My voice rose. "You weren't ashamed of me or our love then, but you are now."

"Ginny, stop it!" Mark shot out hoarsely. "You mustn't say—"

"Yes, I must, because your parents aren't thinking of you. They're only thinking of themselves and the 'disgrace' we brought on them. The rich Mr. and Mrs. Fenton aren't going to let their son marry a nobody even if they break his heart."

Oh, yes, Mark's parents were very smart. They must have counted on my saying just the things I did. And so Mark and I parted with only the memory of hateful, sharp words between us, with cold bitterness instead of the warmth of each other's arms.

Mark was back at school two days when a note came from him. "Darling," he wrote, "I'm sorry we quarreled before I left. If I hurt you, forgive me. I know you didn't mean all the things you said, because you must realize, as I do, that whatever has happened to us, we brought on ourselves."

I wrote back that I'd meant every word. I declared his family had treated us like criminals instead of two people whose only fault was loving each other too much. I ended by telling Mark I was glad he'd at least had enough spirit to write me and break a promise that his mother had wheedled out of him.

His brief answer by return mail said, "Your letter only makes me agree with my parents that we do need time to grow up."

WHEN two weeks passed and no more letters came, I grew desperate. Mark was beginning to put me out of his mind the way his family wanted! I kept remembering the day we'd stood so solemnly and given our marriage vows. Mark was my husband. The annulment didn't exist as far as I was concerned. I was going to him!

The following Saturday morning I told my mother I was going to visit a girl chum of mine who had married and was living in a near-by suburb. Instead, I got the bus that would take me to the town, sixty miles away, where Mark attended college. At first I sat tense and fearful, wondering if someone might board the bus who knew me. But no one did. As the miles rolled by, my heart began to pound. I kept feeling the ridge of my dime-store wedding ring under my black suede gloves. When I arrived, I went to a neighborhood on the opposite side of the town from where the college was situated. It was filled with cheap rooming houses. I finally found one where no questions were asked. My cheeks burned when the fat, frizzy-haired landlady said, "As long as I get my money, I ain't curious." The room she showed me had a sagging double bed, a dresser, and two rickety chairs. The wallpaper was stained and the rug was torn, but I took it. I had no choice.

As soon as she left, I phoned Mark's fraternity house. When I finally heard his voice, tears came to my eyes. "Mark, darling," I said, "it's Ginny. I'm in town."

"Ginny!" His voice fairly sang. "But how—"

I told him quickly that no one knew I was there. I gave him the address of the room-

ing house. "I've told the landlady I'm expecting—my husband," I finished in a low voice.

"You've told—" There was a pause, then, "All right. I'll be there."

I'll never forget the look on Mark's face when he walked into that awful room. "Ginny, you've got to get out of this dump."

I ran and put my arms around him. "Mark, listen, please, I know it's awful, but—" I almost said we wouldn't be there if it weren't for his family. I caught myself in time and continued, "Mark, I couldn't stand being away from you. I married you, and no matter what any judge says, you're my husband. You always will be. Darling, I love you so."

My mouth was near his and my arms tight around his neck. "Ginny, sweet," he murmured, and his lips came down on mine, hard, clinging, hurting me with their fierceness.

I leaned back against the firm possessiveness of his arms. "This will be the honeymoon we never had," I whispered.

That was the beginning of our stolen love, of week ends, of such crazy, heady bliss that the sordidness of our surroundings didn't matter—not at first. But gradually our being together was clouded by the lies we had to tell, the nervous watchfulness we kept lest we be discovered. There was that inevitable moment when my mother faced me and said, "You've been seeing Mark all these week ends, haven't you?"

I admitted it and winced at the hurt in her eyes. "But don't try to stop me," I warned her hysterically, "because you can't. No one can." And so she let me go.

One week end Mark had to study for an exam, and he brought his books to the room. I sat quietly, trying not to disturb him, but it didn't work. After a while he slammed his books on the floor and said, "I can't stand it. This dump is driving me crazy. We can't go on like this."

I knew more and more that he felt he should have kept to the promise he made his family. I was afraid of losing him again, afraid and selfish. All I wanted was Mark, and all my life as an only child I'd learned how to get the things I wanted. So I silenced him with my arms and my lips. I begged tearfully, "Darling, all we have is each other. Don't send me away!"

"I won't," he whispered. "To hell with the exam. I'll get by."

AND then there was that one never-to-be-forgotten week end when I arrived, sick and scared, to tell Mark I was going to have a child. With my words, all the youngness seemed to go out of him. His lips twisted into a tight, grim line, and his body sagged wearily.

"I should have known," he said at last. "I should have seen what all this lying and sneaking would lead to. But you—"

"That's right," I cried bitterly, "blame me!"

"I do," he flared back. "It was your idea coming here, Ginny. You kept saying how much you loved me. Well, what we've

known in this cheap, sordid room was never real love."

"Mark, you can't say that," I sobbed wildly. "You're to blame, too."

"Yes, you're right." His voice sounded dead. "I walked into it. I asked for it."

Fear sent cold twinges through me. "Mark, we—we'll get married again now, won't we?"

He stared right through me. "My mother mustn't hear about this now. It might kill her."

He was worried about his mother. "What about me?" I asked crazily. "Are you going to marry me?"

Dazedly his gaze met mine. "Why, yes, Ginny, I'm going to marry you."

He didn't add, "Because there is no other way out." But that's what I knew he meant.

And so that very afternoon we stood before a justice of the peace in a near-by country village. The ecstasy and joy we'd known before were only shadows to taunt us. Afterward I had another bitter pill to swallow when Mark said, "We'll still keep our marriage quiet until the Christmas holidays. I'll be going home then. That's when I'll tell my family—about everything."

"And this time," I thought triumphantly, "they won't be able to do a thing because you're really mine now."

That thought helped to keep me going during the days that followed. For I found little comfort in the fact we were really married when we still had to carry on our subterfuge. Our nerves were jumpy, our tongues quick to lash out. We quarreled too much. Yet there were times when Mark and I kissed and laughed the way we used to. One of those times I asked, "You're glad about the baby, aren't you, Mark?"

He'd smiled, a funny, twisted smile. "Yes, I'm glad, Ginny—only I find myself thinking about it all the time, wondering and worrying about what's going to happen to us."

That was the trouble. That was why he couldn't study. That was why one Saturday when I arrived, I found him waiting for me, pale and haggard.

"It's finished," he announced abruptly. "I've flunked all my mid-term exams. I've been kicked out of school."

"But, Mark," I gasped, "I thought—"

"You thought." He laughed sharply. "You didn't think I'd been able to study properly these past weeks, did you? You didn't think I could write decent exams wondering how I was going to tell my family about us?"

I saw all at once that I hadn't thought about a lot of things, about how close Mark really was to his family and how he did owe them something after all. He'd made a promise to them, but I'd made him break it. "Mark—" I swallowed—"I'm sorry. It's been—my fault."

He didn't seem to hear. "I'm not going to graduate. I never knew how much I wanted to until now."

Tears pricked my eyes. I'd done that to Mark, too, with my selfishness. If only I'd waited a year as his family had asked, if only I'd played fair. Mark could have graduated and we could have remarried decently in a church with no regrets, with no feeling of shame.

"Mark, I'll make it up to you. I will!" He said dully. "I wonder if you can—"

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Well, that's what I've wondered so many, many times since that day. Mark and I and our baby boy are now living in a city hundreds of miles from our home town. Mark has a clerk's job in the office of a large engineering firm. He was studying to be an engineer and if he'd graduated, he would have been eligible for a highly paid technician's job. But he'll have a position like that before long, for he's going to night school to finish his studies and get his degree.

I encouraged him to do it, even though it means long hours for him and lonely nights for the baby and me. I know it's the least I can do. But, more than that, I know Mark. He's sworn he'll never see his family again until he's made good. Well, he'll make good, and someday we'll go back and show them we're made of the right stuff. I'm understanding gradually how Mark's family must have planned and dreamed for him, and how all they did was motivated by their love for him and their desire for his happiness.

Mark's flunking out of school, our remarriage, and the baby coming too soon created the kind of scandal that takes a lot of living down. But we'll do it. I got Mark, yes, but I'll always be haunted by the fact that he felt he had to marry me. I'm sure he loves me and our baby, but that love is something I can never take for granted as other wives can. I realize that all my life I'll have to work to hold his love, to make up for all the things our marriage cost him.

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Mine Was the Sin

(Continued from page 9)

Oh, yes, Jean was the one to copy. I just took it for granted that I'd have to get over wanting Jeff. Jean and Jeff. That's the way it was.

I don't know just when it was I realized Jean didn't love Jeff as much as she pretended to. Maybe it was the day she confided, "Gosh, I'm bored. I'd like to get out of this hick town!" Maybe it was the day I first noticed that the tall, blond drug salesman, Tom Barton, from River City, made Mercerton a stopover twice as often as he used to, and that on those nights Jean would never make a date with Jeff.

In a way, I guess I wasn't surprised when Jean slipped me an envelope one night just before Christmas and whispered, "Give this to Jeff tomorrow, will you, Martha? I guess I won't be seeing you any more."

Then, just before she went out the door in her close-fitting black coat, she turned, smiling at me speculatively. "You're a nice kid, Martha. So I'm going to tell you something. I've been watching you carry the torch for Jeff. Now I'm leaving, why don't you go after him? In this narrow store, it ought to be a cinch. Just push up against him in the aisle, rub your arm against his when you're working at the shelves, touch him once in a while as if it were an accident. Jeff's got enough passion in him for two men!"

I felt a shameful red rushing up in my face, but she laughed and let the door slam behind her. It was three years before I saw her again.

I FOUND Jeff in the back room of the store next morning, sacking potatoes.

"Jean gave me this for you," I said quickly, thrusting the envelope into his hands. Then I hurried back into the store.

I managed to wait on customers without needing anything from the back room for more than an hour. Then Jeff came in. We were alone in the store. He began helping me fill the orders to be delivered, and if I hadn't known him so well, I wouldn't have noticed the white look about his lips.

"I suppose Jean told you she was going away with Barton, that salesman fellow," he said after a time, expressionlessly.

"She—she didn't tell me that," I stammered. "She just said she wouldn't be seeing me any more."

"What else did she say?" His dark eyes came sharply to my face.

Remembering Jean's saying I loved Jeff, I answered confusedly. "She didn't say anything. Just—just that she was bored and wanted to get out of this hick town."

"I'd have taken her away!" he cried. Then his lips tightened and his color rose angrily. "No, I wouldn't have! If she wanted to go, good riddance! I wouldn't

walk across the street to bring her back. Do you hear? Not across the street! Take care of things here, will you, Martha? Get the Oats boy to deliver for you till I get back."

I thought wretchedly that Jeff was going after Jean, but he didn't. He was drunk for three days, coming into the store only once when he stared at me unseeing, took twenty dollars from the cash register, and went out again without speaking.

On the fourth day, however, he was at work, sober, when I got to the store in the morning. He never thanked me for my extra work, but my pay check that week was made out for an extra five dollars which neither of us mentioned.

We didn't mention Jean either, but I thought of her often in those next few weeks. In spite of myself, I kept noticing how many chances I had to do just what she had advised. I could brush past Jeff in the narrow aisles; I could put my hand on his arm; I could touch him lightly, accidentally, a dozen times a day. We were seldom alone in the busy store, but when we were, I thought more and more about Jeff's nearness, my heart pounding.

I wanted him to put his arms around me; but since he didn't, why shouldn't I encourage him? Oh, I was timid enough, shy enough, but day after day, temptation nagged at me. I didn't consider then that because of my continued presence, good nature and growing prettiness, Jeff would eventually have noticed me. I didn't know either what must so often happen when a good girl uses her sex clumsily in a bad girl's tricks.

The first time I let my hand linger an instant longer than was necessary on Jeff's hand as I gave him a salesbook, I kept my eyes down, feeling the hot blood surge into my face. But Jeff didn't seem to notice. He was silent and moody those days. I ached with knowing that his frowning preoccupation meant he was remembering Jean. Perhaps there was pity mixed with my jealousy. Maybe that helped make it easy for me to scheme for those frequent contacts between us.

I remember the first day he noticed. He was arranging packaged soap on the wall shelves when I passed him, brushed his back lightly with my shoulder. He turned quickly.

"Can't you look where you're going?" he snapped. Then he saw my face, and must have read the dismay and confusion and guilt there, for he stared at me a long time. "Well, I'll be darned," he drawled, "you're kind of a pretty girl, aren't you? And you sort of like me, don't you?" He looked back at the empty store and then ran his hand along my arm from my shoulder to my finger tips in one slow motion. "Two can play at that game, sister. Now, get Mrs. Wagner's order put up before I forget it's broad daylight, and a customer may walk in any second!"

I wanted to die. I wanted to quit my job. I wanted to cry. But I only walked

about in a daze, gathering up Mrs. Wagner's order, my arm tingling where he had touched it.

The last thing I expected was Jeff's apology. But at six that evening he said gruffly, as I put on my coat to leave, "Wait a minute, Martha, till I lock up, and I'll take you home. It isn't out of my way."

I guess I should have refused, but I didn't. Something about loving a man as I loved Jeff makes you eager to say "yes" as soon as he wants to be with you. If I'd been charting my happy moments that evening as we drove to my rooming house in his delivery truck, I'm sure the mark would have run way up off the paper when he said, "I'm sorry I got fresh with you, Martha. You're a nice kid, and I shouldn't ever snap at you, only—well, I haven't been myself lately."

"I know," I murmured softly. "I'd like to see you always laughing and joking as you used to, Jeff. If— If there's anything I can do—" I said impulsively, I put my hand on his arm, and after a minute, he took a hand off the wheel and covered mine.

"Maybe I've been missing something," he said. "You could be dynamite, Martha, if a guy weren't too dumb to appreciate you." He glanced sidewise at me. "I never went much for tall girls, but the way you're built, you could make me change my mind."

Then, just before I got out of the truck, he said, "I have to drive over to Sedgenville Sunday afternoon. How about your riding along?"

THAT Sunday date was our first. We didn't drive home until after dark, and on the way, Jeff parked on a sideroad, took me in his arms and kissed me. His lips flamed against mine until he pushed me aside. "I was right on both counts," he muttered shakily. "You're a nice kid—but you're dynamite, too."

I was both amazed and thrilled by the feeling Jeff's kisses roused in me. I wanted him to kiss me again. I leaned toward him as naturally and as brazenly as though I really understood the wild depth of emotion such caresses could arouse. For an instant Jeff hesitated. Then his arms came around me again; hard this time, possessive, breathtaking.

I don't know why I was the one that time who pulled away. Perhaps it was because I was afraid or because I was still protected by an instinctive shyness.

"Let's go home, Jeff," I begged breathlessly, and though he sighed as he turned on the ignition, I'll always believe that in a way he was relieved. He didn't want to hurt me. No, I'll never think he wanted to hurt me. It was only that I—well, I had learned that I had power to stir him, to quicken his breath, to bring the burning rush of blood to his face, and I suppose I was drunk with my power. I couldn't leave him alone. Whenever we were alone together, I led him on. And then, in the end, I wasn't wise enough to hold him off.

I played the game of a siren when I was really only a foolish, lovesick girl.

One night late in the spring, when the creeks were all flowing and the apple orchards all in bloom and the whole world was too sweet and too beautiful to endure, I let that mad, glorious urgency within us capture me completely. Only afterward, when the lovely night outside Jeff's truck seemed to have stilled and darkened, did I begin to tremble with fear and shame. Jeff didn't speak for a long time, not in fact until a sob I tried to stifle escaped me and he realized I was crying.

"You brought this on yourself, kid," he said coldly.

"I know," I sobbed. "It isn't your fault, Jeff. But I didn't know—I'd be so afraid—"

"Afraid of what? Oh, you mean afraid I wouldn't marry you? Well, if that's what's worrying you, I guess we could get married. In fact, I think I ought to get married. Maybe it'll keep me from making nice little girls like you cry."

I know that during that long minute before he put his arms around me again, I hated him. But as soon as he touched me, as soon as he whispered against my wet cheek, "Don't cry, honey," I forgot to hate him. "I'll try to be a good husband to you, dear," he promised. "I guess I talked that way to you because I despise myself for being such a heel."

"Oh, Jeff," I cried, "I love you so! It was just because I love you. I'll be so happy when we're married."

IT was nearly a year before Jeff actually said that he loved me. But he was so sweet, so gentle and understanding, that I was happy as his wife in spite of remembering I'd trapped him into marriage.

Jeff was good about my folks, too, always willing to send ten dollars to Ma when she or my young brothers and sisters were in need. They had long since drifted from the vicinity of Mercerton and were now more migrant farm workers than tenant farmers.

Jeff and I still worked together in the store, living in a four-room brown house with nice furnishings upstairs and an ancient, inefficient furnace in the basement. I'll always remember our evenings in that old brown house when Jeff and I were all by ourselves, cut off from the town by drawn shades. We had all the companionship, all the privacy, all the love-making any young couple could desire, and the first time Jeff told me, with a little wonder and complete contentment in his voice, that he loved me, my happiness doubled.

"At last he's forgotten Jean," I thought and realized that memory of Jean had bothered me more than I had admitted. Often in those next two years I would stop my work to think joyously, "Jeff loves me. Oh, were any two people ever more happily married?"

I don't know exactly why Jean returned to Mercerton. Maybe she wanted the security of her old job; maybe she found the city a lonely place; maybe she even remembered Jeff. I don't know. But she did come back, and she went to work behind the fountain across the street. Right away she came over to see Jeff and me.

Jeff wasn't in the first time she came, so I had an opportunity to look her over without that awful consciousness I was

later to know that she was standing too close to him, hanging on his words too eagerly.

She looked hard to me, and brittle, but she was pretty as ever. Her red hair was swept up from her forehead, her black skirt and green sweater were meant for a schoolgirl, but they revealed the firmly matured lines of her figure alluringly.

"So you married Jeff," she remarked, smiling. "Maybe I made a mistake running away. Jeff was always a better man than Tom Barton!"

"You and Tom are divorced?" I asked coolly. I had no intention of discussing Jeff with her. I was older now, more poised than I had been when Jean always led our conversations.

"I divorced Tom last year," she told me. "He was still a salesman, you know, away from home too many nights to suit me. Where is Jeff now?"

"Out with the deliveries." I didn't mean to be short with her. I don't believe I was particularly jealous of her then. I had a life Jean had no part in, a busy, happy life wherein I was more concerned with the early delivery of the laundry, with someone's pleased comment on the freshness of our vegetables or with getting away early enough to bake Jeff's favorite apple pie for supper than I was in ridding myself of possible rivals. I guess I had the typical married woman's complacent belief that her life is settled and nothing can disrupt it.

Maybe that's why I wasn't worried at first when Jean began obviously making a play for Jeff. Jeff seemed to avoid her. I even teased him about it.

"You're afraid you'll make me jealous with Jean, aren't you?" I asked one evening.

Jeff reddened, then grinned. "I wish she'd stay away from the store," he commented mildly. "She's a natural born trouble-maker, and she'll probably die the same way."

I wonder if Jeff remembers saying that. I've thought of it sometimes—sometimes in those hours when I can't seem to drive my mind away from what happened afterward.

At the time, I hugged Jeff close to me and kissed him. "You sweet husband," I murmured, "I could be jealous of you, you know. Only—well, we seem to be still on our honeymoon!"

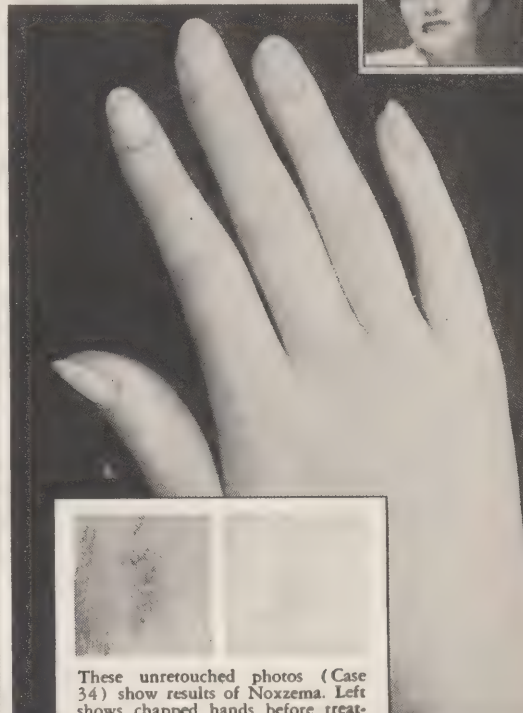
He held me close. "I'm crazy about you, Martha. I couldn't ever have been as happy with Jean as I am with you."

A chill swept through me. He'd been comparing Jean and me! He'd been considering what his life might have been married to her. He'd looked at her and thought—oh, what had he thought? A black misery descended upon me. Maybe it would have been better if I'd stayed that way, on guard. But something happened within the week to bring the whole thing out in the open and, finally, to make me feel secure again.

Jean pressed herself on Jeff too soon, so openly. She slipped into the back room one afternoon just at closing time, while I was busy with the last customer of the day, and by the time I was free to enter the back room myself, I found her leaning against Jeff, her lips turned invitingly up to his. His arms were lifting to her shoulders when I cried out sharply, "All right,

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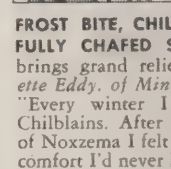
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WHAT EVERY MARRIAGE NEEDS

To Make a Go of It

• By Donald McLaren •

HOW MANY interests have your husband and you in common? How many things are there which you both like to discuss or do together? If your marriage is a model of perfection, you can bet there are dozens of them. But if your happiness falls short of what you hoped it would be, the reason why may be found right here. Here also you may find the cure.



talk about and to work on together. Walking, driving and visiting together will be more pleasure because you can discuss the houses you see. Next to a child, a home is the thing which kindles the deepest interest in most of us.

3. **SHARE A HOBBY.** Isn't there some hobby that your husband and you could both enjoy? Most people find it fun to collect something or other. Photography is another popular favorite. But there are hobbies for every taste. Surely you could find one about which you could both be enthusiastic. The discovery of a mutual hobby will greatly increase your pleasure in each other's company.

4. **LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT HIS WORK.** Many wives who complain that their husbands never mention their work to them would not understand what they were talking about if they did. A man doesn't feel inclined to discuss a subject with you unless you know enough about it to listen intelligently, and to ask sensible questions. There may even be some way in which you could help him. However little that aid may be, your relationship will be strengthened if you give it.

5. **LEARN TO LIKE WHAT HE LIKES.** Modern women often don't want to subordinate themselves to a man. They feel they should hold fast to their own personalities, and they dislike the idea of making themselves over to please a man. However, you should realize that when you learn to enjoy something which you never appreciated before, you are not subordinating yourself, but opening up new horizons. It is a great triumph for your personality, not a surrender. Not only your love but your life will be broadened and enriched by your learning to enter fully into his life.

In any case, nothing is too much trouble or too great a sacrifice which will smooth the path of your married love. If there are signs of growing friction in your home, it's probably because you and your husband lack sufficient common interests to bind you closely together. Act quickly. Check this flow of misery at its source. Never rest until you have found the thing which will fill your need for something more to share.

It is a strain on your love, however great it may be, if you must face evening after evening with a man who is obviously bored with all the things you like to talk about. And going out together is no solution if he wants to go bowling or to a boxing match, while you want to dance or see a movie. Subconsciously your annoyance over this accumulates, and sooner or later you begin to quarrel over trifles.

You may as well realize that the solving of any marriage problem is mainly up to the woman. Women are cleverer at handling human relations than men are. Besides, their work usually is such that while they're doing it, they can think about and plan other things. As you iron, bake or sew, see if you can't figure out a way to increase your common interests.

Just as suggestions, here are some of the things which students of modern marriage have discovered are effective in creating common interests between husband and wife.

1. **HAVE A CHILD.** This is the most obvious and probably the best of them all. You'll both enjoy talking about your child, planning for his future and playing with him. Children also cement a marriage by reason of the fact that during pregnancy and motherhood a woman comes to fully appreciate the protection and support of her husband, while he wakes anew to his responsibilities. In this flowering of manhood and womanhood, they instinctively cling closer together.

2. **PLAN A HOUSE.** Statistics on marriage show that even if there is little hope of building a home in the near future, when couples begin to plan one, their happiness is greatly increased. If you can persuade your husband that it isn't too soon to start planning your ideal home, from now on you'll always have something to

Jean, get out of here! And stay out! You're not welcome in this store any more—either in the back or the front!"

Jeff looked as white and sick as I felt, but Jean never changed color. She laughed instead.

"I'll go," she agreed mockingly, "but aren't you being pretty old-fashioned? After all, what's a kiss between friends? Jeff doesn't want me to stay out of the store, do you, darling?"

"Yes, I do," he contradicted harshly.

She smiled up at him archly. "Never mind. I forgive you, Jeff," she said. "I'd say the same thing myself—in front of my wife. Good-by."

When she was gone, I turned to Jeff furiously. "Don't think because I didn't say anything in front of her that I don't blame you too," I cried bitterly.

If I had spoken less angrily, even if I had turned away without speaking, we might not have quarreled so sharply and desperately. We drove home without touching, and I felt scorched inside, as though something which had been a bright, lovely flame had turned black and ugly. I didn't start supper. Jeff didn't raid the icebox. We wandered about the house in grim silence, and finally Jeff went to the basement.

I went to bed after a while, still hearing him moving down there from time to time. At last I heard him singing! I remembered then the bottle of whisky we had hidden in the fruit cellar. Jeff was drunk.

He came up to me that way, staggering a little, his eyes red and miserable. He sat on the side of our bed and said thickly, "Martha, don't be mad at me. I can't stand it."

"You haven't been drunk since we got married." I threw off the blankets and sat up, facing him in the cold.

"I've always been happy until now," he answered simply.

I cried then and I forgot Jean, forgot that Jeff was drunk, forgot everything except how much I loved him as we clung together, crying together. It was morning before we slept, close and warm in each other's arms, as we had on our wedding night.

AND somehow, after that night, I never doubted Jeff again. I never doubted my ability to be all the companion, all the sweetheart, all the woman he needed. Those next two months were a wonderful part of our marriage. Jeff had never been so affectionate; I had never been quite so eagerly responsive.

Because we were together practically all the time, day and night, I knew Jean didn't see him alone. I watched other men in the drugstore with her. I heard that she was going to marry someone from Sedgewille, and all my fears were lulled.

It was early in March when the letter came from Ma, saying she was sick in a trailer camp near Malone, five hundred miles west. And several hours after Jeff and I had decided I should go to her, I was surprised when he said abruptly, "Don't go, Martha. Let's send money instead."

"But if Pa gets the money, you know he's just as apt to gamble it away as to get Ma a doctor or a nurse. If she were up and around, she could get hold of the money, but sick that way—" I stopped

turning the steak I was frying for our supper to gaze worriedly at Jeff.

"Yes," he agreed slowly, "it looks like you've got to go. But—you won't stay long, will you?"

"I suppose that depends on how Ma is. I'll come home as soon as I can, you may be sure of that. You can get Mr. Owens to help out at the store, can't you?"

"I wasn't thinking of the store." He caught my arm as I passed him. "I was thinking how I'll miss you, honey."

"I expect Ma misses me, too," I returned crisply. Frankly, I had been homesick to see Ma for some time, and I was annoyed that Jeff didn't want me to go to her. But as soon as he dropped my arm, I snuggled against him contritely. "I'll miss you too, Jeff. I'll not stay a minute longer than just to see Ma has good care and the kids aren't hungry or anything. Gee, you don't think I want to leave you, do you? It'll be the first time we've been separated!"

WHEN I arrived at Malone the next evening, I found Ma with a bad case of flu rapidly turning into pneumonia, the trailer camp only a weed-grown field, Pa away on some scheme of his own, and the kids scared and helpless. The doctor I found advised having Ma removed from the ramshackle trailer to the hospital, and as I watched her there, her patient, lined face so grateful for clean sheets and warm blankets and efficient care, I couldn't regret my trip west. I wrote Jeff I would be home as soon as Ma was out of the hospital, probably the middle of the week, but when Ma's natural vitality put her on her feet again three days earlier that I had expected, I took the first train home.

Maybe all this sounds commonplace, the usual story of a wife leaving home and returning unexpectedly. But it wasn't commonplace to me. I was looking forward so delightedly to being with Jeff again. That early Sunday morning as I carried my traveling bag the few blocks from the railway station to our brown house, I had a feeling of thrilling adventure. The thought of Jeff's surprise and joy was in my mind as I went up the steps.

I expected Jeff to be still in bed, so I was not surprised to find the night latch on when I tried the door. I got out my key and walked in. The odor of gas hit me in the face like a blow!

"Jeff!" I screamed. "Jeff!"

There was no answer. I ran through the living room to the kitchen where the oven gas jet on the range was turned on full. The oven door was open, the broiler door closed. I knew instantly what had happened—that the old furnace had failed to burn properly and Jeff had lit the oven for additional heat, not noticing that the closing broiler door put out the flame while the gas continued to pour out.

Through the stifling fumes, I ran into the bedroom beyond the kitchen.

Jeff lay on the bed beside the low, closed window. I knew fresh air must pour into the room to clear out the gas, and I ran around the bed to throw up the window.

That's when I saw her. Jean lay on the floor between the bed and the window, her pink satin slip twisted around her, her red hair tumbled about her face. Some

sense of danger must have made her reach for the window just before she was overcome.

I don't know why I didn't go back and shut the door and let the gas kill me, too. I don't know what life-saving instinct made my hands raise that window, drag Jeff from the bed and push him out the unscreened opening to the lawn beneath. I don't know where I found the strength, nor why I lifted Jean and thrust her out after him. It wasn't that I wanted to save her life. It must have been the same instinctive reaction to a crisis that made Mrs. Pendleton next door, seeing me from her kitchen window, rush over and, without asking more than one shocked question, rush back to phone Dr. Simpson and

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Mr. Killion, the chief of the volunteer fire department in charge of the pulmotor.

We had both Jean and Jeff wrapped in blankets by the time Dr. Simpson arrived. Jean was dead. But there was still a chance for Jeff; enough of a chance to justify the use of the pulmotor.

OH, I know what they said, those other wives in Mercerton—"If my husband ever brought another woman into my house—!" "If I couldn't trust my husband while I was away from home two weeks—!" and "I'd rather see my husband dead!"

But those women never stood by while their husbands lay with no breath in their lungs except that pumped there. They don't know the awful shock of hearing someone murmur, "They might just as well give up. He's gone."

"No!" I cried. "Oh, no, don't give up!"

In that endless minute before Dr. Simpson answered my cry, I sent up my voiceless prayer and promise, "Dear God, don't let Jeff die. I love him so, God. Don't let him die! It was all my fault. I should have known Jean would be after him again. And knowing he's the sort of man who can't resist a woman, I should never have left him. Don't let him die!"

Then Dr. Simpson straightened from Jeff's side, nodding his gray head reassuringly. "There's still hope, Mrs. Winter. We won't give up."

Yes, I went back to my husband. Or rather I never left him. While scandal rocked the town and the facts of Jean's death were reprinted in the city papers,

while Jeff was still recovering in the hospital, I never invited questions, not even from those closest to me. You can hide some disgrace, but you can't hide a death. Everyone had to know; the town had to talk it out. Although the coroner declared Jean's death an accident, there were stories of murder and suicide, even of a suicide pact. But that was all just gossip. Everyone must have known, really, that Jean wasn't the kind to give up her life voluntarily, nor Jeff the kind to murder anyone—even though he was weak wherein women were concerned.

I can't say everything was the same between Jeff and me. All my tears nor his couldn't put our love, our marriage back where it was. Having this awful shadow on our love was a punishment I rightly deserved. Wasn't I to blame, I asked myself, for arousing Jeff's masculine hunger—even to the point of trapping him into marriage? I alone was to blame for inflaming his emotions until they cried out for constant fulfillment.

But we managed, that first morning after he came home, to go to the store together as we always had. The curious stares that set us apart from the townspeople served in a way to draw us together. Each familiar act of working together helped to heal the horrible wound between us.

But soon there was little work to do. Our trade dropped almost to the vanishing point. And then, just when I thought things were getting a little better, Jeff overheard the Pendleton boy telling that cruel story I had kept from him—the

senseless theory that Jeff had murdered Jean and then tried to take his own life.

"Is that what they think?" Jeff cried hoarsely when we were inside our own house, away from that boyish voice in the yard next door. "But that isn't true! It isn't true. You don't believe that, do you?"

"No, Jeff!" I protested. "No! Oh, Jeff, let's go away from here. Let's sell out and move away. I can't stand it—just as we were beginning to be more like ourselves again, to have it all brought up again this way. I want to go away where nobody knows about it!"

I didn't mean to cry out like that, to put the burden of decision, of comforting me, on Jeff's shoulders. But perhaps it was the best thing I could have done. My nerves snapped those last weeks we were in Mercerton. I couldn't work, sleep, nor eat. And I think that in caring for me, in arranging all the details of the store's sale, in deciding where we were to go, Jeff felt something of his old strength and self-confidence return.

We live in a city on the West Coast now, with a small grocery in a suburb. It's been two years since we left Mercerton. Will we ever really be happy again? I think we will. I think now that in the summer, after our baby is born, we'll be able to forget the past. I feel in writing this I've drained the last trace of bitterness from my heart. And if sometimes we both look back and wish we could live over the past differently—well, isn't that what everyone must do, after she has sinned?

Remember—We're Divorced!

(Continued from page 5)



decorating establishment. That was before I'd met Don, before I became an assistant interior decorator with a good salary and a better future. Even then, big, sandy-haired Blane would leave his bookkeeper's desk up front to lift the heavy bolts of drapery fabric off the shelves for me. I was so little and dark and skinny I thought he was really doing it out of kindness, but Blane always told me Cleopatra was little and dark and skinny too. Then I'd met Don, and I guess, even in those days, Blane could see how it was going to be with me and the young radio singer, for about that time he decided to leave the shop and go in for newspaper work. He'd always wanted to do reporting. When I told him that Don had asked me to marry him, but that of course, with radio work so awfully uncertain, I had no intention of giving up my job, Blane gave up his. Dear Blane, you always were on the level, weren't you?

I wish I could have been on the level myself. I can still see Blane sitting opposite me in the restaurant the night I came back, his eyes haggard with worry. I can feel his hand warm and comforting on my cold fingers as he pressed them between his palm and the white cloth.

He said, "You're still pretty crazy about him, aren't you, Connie? And just the same, I'm going to do a damn fool thing. I'm going to ask you to marry me. Because when a man's been in love with the same girl as long as I have, there's only one thing to do.

"Of course, I know I'm not Don," he added defiantly, as if he would have given all his possessions if for just one evening he might be.

"And I'm glad you're not, Blane," I lied, squeezing the hand trying to withdraw from mine. "You're kind, considerate, and real. You've made me proud and—"

I stopped suddenly. I couldn't say happy, because it wouldn't be true—not with Don's face swimming before Blane's; Don, hurt and miserable, dark and handsomely bitter, waiting all evening in Jock's; Don downing drink after drink; Don knowing at last that the girl he had called his "good woman" had closed the

door to him forever, that his last harbor was lost. I had to swallow quickly to keep back the tears.

So that was how I became engaged to Blane Gordon. From the day I had boarded the train to Reno, I had known he would ask me, and I had known I would accept him. Not because—honest, blunt, shy with women—he had ever stirred me emotionally, but because I had to put something between me and Don Stafford. And when a girl does a thing like that, I guess she deserves everything Fate has arranged for her.

I have never talked about those terrible weeks after my divorce before, but from the casual remarks I've heard other women make, I guess most divorcees go through the same torture.

At night or when I walked in the street alone it was unbearable. Every tall, graceful man just out of my line of vision might be Don—every cavalier handing a woman into a taxi, every desolate drunk swaggering defiantly down the curb so you mightn't guess he felt abandoned by the whole world—until I hastened my steps and saw with a sick mixture of relief and disappointment that it wasn't. Poor Blane! I guess he realized all the time I was living completely in the past

and not one bit in the future, that even though I swore Don was a cad and I was well rid of him, I was blaming myself for deserting a man who wasn't bad but only weak because women never let him alone.

I wonder what would have happened if one night, coming out of the movies, we hadn't bumped into Jim Schaeffer, who wrote a gossip column for Blane's paper.

Blane said, "Let's duck, honey—unless you really want to know who's sleeping with whom."

But before we knew it, the swarthy, ferret-eyed man had joined us and we were at a gay, crowded bar, sipping sidecars and chatting.

That night before Blane told me good night, he held me against him a moment longer than usual and gave me a funny look out of his intelligent gray eyes.

"Connie," he said, "maybe you don't realize it, honey, but our engagement isn't any more secret from this evening on than the signs in the Lexington Avenue subway trains. Do you mind terribly?"

I stared at him, aghast. Our engagement public! But I wasn't ready for that. I couldn't bear prying eyes, congratulations, people saying, "Well, thank heavens, Connie, you've got over that heel Don at last!" I couldn't!

I bit down on my lip and managed a wry smile.

"It's all right, Blane," I whispered. "One can't be a coward forever."

Blane held me closer and longer than he ever had, and I could feel his heart ticking like a big, strong drum while my own felt cold and leaden in my breast. It frightened me to think how different everything would be if these were Don's arms.

"Oh, God," I prayed deep inside me, "don't let me hurt Blane. He's so good."

THAT was the first week in February.

I'd been back almost two months, and never again, after I'd left him waiting at Jock's, had Don made any attempt to see me. But I'd heard that Nella had gone to the Coast, that Don's last audition was a flop, that he was drinking, that he was telling whoever would listen that I had let him down when he needed me most; that it wasn't like me, for he'd always figured I was the kind of girl who would stand by a guy.

Each new bit of information was like an icepick plunged into an open wound. I was like a mother who knows her favorite child is a weakling and cannot blame him even while he is doing her personal injury.

And then on that eventful day in February, Jim Schaeffer wrote it up for anyone who reads the *New York Sentinel* to see.

"Guess who's going to be linked?

Blane Gordon, who covers the sports events for our own *Sentinel*, and Constance Stafford, the girl Nella Ross catapulted to Reno recently. Looks like every cloud has a silver lining!"

I didn't know anything about it until Alice Gordon's oversized body in its inevitable black dress came spinning into the stockroom a half hour after the paper was on the stands. Alice never missed Jim Schaeffer's scandal column, because people who break up homes generally fur-

nish new ones, and she was always in the sidelines waiting for a lead on a redecorating job.

"Come down off there, chicken," she shouted, her face white but her eyes like shoe buttons. "I want to show you something."

Then five minutes later she was holding me against her mountainous bosom and a river of tears was mottling her powdered cheeks.

"Connie," she was gasping, "Blane's all I've got, my brother. If you make him unhappy—I'll—I'll snap every bone in your little body. Connie, I know how it is. I'm not asking you to be in love with him. That's something you can't turn on like water from a tap. But I am asking you to give him a square deal, honey! If you give him that, I'll love you the rest of my life, and when I die, Connie, you can have the business!"

DON'S name wasn't even mentioned, but there it was, burning in the back of both our brains, written in letters so large that you didn't have to have eyes to see what Alice Gordon was worrying about.

So it shouldn't have been such a shock when Don phoned me that afternoon about four. After all, nothing is so public as a newspaper. I can still remember how I had to put down the receiver and take a big gulp of water from the glass that was always on my desk before I could talk.

Four months, and then all at once I was hearing a voice that, night after night, I had heard in my dreams pleading for forgiveness. He spoke as casually and gaily as if we had never borne the same name, shared the same bed. Blane was one of the best, Don declared. It was time I got wise to myself. Nobody could be gladder than he about our engagement.

By the time he came out with the invitation, I was all churned up with anger. Didn't I think it would be kind of civilized if he and Blane and I took dinner together? He'd engaged a table at the Sert Room for the three of us that night.

"Yes," I thought bitterly, "and you'll let Blane take the check when the evening's over, I suppose. Maybe all you're thinking about is a free meal and letting people who know you see us together so they won't dream you're hurt by the fact that any woman could get over your fatal charm so quickly! Well, it's just too bad about your experiment in sophistication, because Blane's gone up to Albany on an assignment and won't be back tonight."

I remember how I tried to match my gaiety to Don's. Maybe it would have been better if we'd both been honest. Under those circumstances, I couldn't possibly have found myself saying in a hard, too bright voice, "But, of course, Don, I'll have dinner with you myself. After all, we've known each other a long time. No, Blane won't mind. It's only the unknown that's dangerous. Remember? Seven o'clock, then, at the Waldorf. No, of course, I'll be there. Why should I stand you up? Don't be silly, Don. I wouldn't miss this for anything."

Afterwards, I sat staring into the black hole of the mouthpiece for a long, terrifying time. It didn't seem possible, and yet there it was. I was going to see Don!

For once in his life, Don was there

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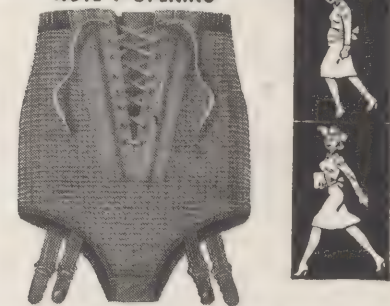


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first. I could see he had suffered. His face was thinner. Little crisscross red veins spoiled the clear dark color of his eyes, and I knew with a sick tugging of my heart he'd been drinking too much.

Then he was shoving a sheaf of orchids against the shoulder of my fur coat and smiling his slanting smile, and I could feel the envious glances of the women about me.

"You look gorgeous, Connie," he was saying, and with the pressure of his fingers on my arm, a wild sweetness shot through my whole body. "Oh, Don, Don," I was thinking, "it isn't true. You haven't done this to us. Everything is as it was—as it must be—"

"Being engaged agrees with you, Connie. I've never seen you so lovely—"

THEY tell me the Sert Room is beautiful, but I didn't see it. I didn't see anything that evening except Don's haunted face, the way his hand twitched when he lifted the glass to toast me, the way he lost his step in dancing when the orchestra played "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," the old song that six years before had been the first song we'd danced to.

All the time we were talking, saying bright nothings, stealing quick glances at each other, melting against each other's bodies in the warm, intimate rhythms of a fox trot, I was thinking, "Don, Don, we've made a mistake! We love each other, Don. That's all that counts. I can forgive your affair with Nella. I won't care what people say about me. It's not too late, Don—if you'll only say it. Lots of people get married again—"

And then we were back at the table, and Don was lifting a goblet of dancing bubbles. "To the eternal fitness of things," he whispered, his eyes mocking. "A long, solitary bachelorhood for me, and a good, healthy marriage for you and Blane."

He swallowed his glassful in one gulp, his glance riveted to the fingers shaking on my own goblet all the time. Not if I died could I have drunk that toast with Don that night. Then as I pretended to have a coughing spell and pushed the glass away from me, a peculiar smile wreathed his bitter mouth.

Suddenly he was on his feet and drawing me up beside him.

"Let's get out of here—darling," he said, and his voice was all choked up.

When you've gone through a long, black tunnel of time and then let yourself be dazzled by the first glimmer of light, you don't like to recall it.

I've never discovered where Don got all the money he spent that night, but he was very insistent. When we were riding around the park in that hansom cab, for instance, and I knew he was paying seven dollars an hour for it, he just wouldn't listen to my protests. By the time his bankroll was used up, it was all of two o'clock, and reluctantly he steered me to the apartment house on Seventy-sixth Street which held so many memories for both of us. I guess Don was feeling as badly as I by that time.

He had a funny look on his face as if he were going to cry, and when he said to me suddenly, "Connie, do you mind if I go up and just take a look at the old joint? I won't stay more than a minute. Besides, I left a couple of shirts and

things—and I've an audition tomorrow," I could no more turn him away than I could have shut the door in the face of a starving child on Christmas Day.

Never, so long as I live, will I forget the expression in Don's dark eyes when he came back to that room he hadn't seen in four months. They seemed to shout, "I had all this and I flung it away—for what?"

"It hasn't changed, Connie. Nothing has changed," he said softly, and I caught myself gulping.

"I guess I'd better get my things together and go," he added.

But he didn't move, and the ticking of the clock on the mantel was no louder than the beating of our hearts. I wanted to cry out, "Don, don't look so wretched. You don't have to go, darling—you never have to!"

But instead I whispered, "It's after two, Don. I've got to go to work tomorrow. Please, Don."

Don turned then, and his face was terrible. His mouth was pale and torn and his eyes blazing. Before I realized what was happening, he had lifted me in his arms as if I were so much fluff.

"Like hell you'll ever belong to anyone else," he was growling against my wet cheek. Then his mouth clamped down on mine, and as he carried me, limp and unresisting, into the bedroom, a great flood of happiness washed over my heart.

IT'S funny how quickly people forget unhappiness. When I came into the shop next day, it seemed to me the whole world had been washed with some wonderful golden stuff. Everything was good and everyone was kind—even Don, especially Don. I had left him sleeping peacefully as a baby, and all day my mind kept flying back to the night before, to Don's wild love-making, to his protestations of eternal love, to his pleading and fierce self-abasement. I think I had completely forgot the existence of Blane until Alice caught me singing at my work.

Then, when she said, "What's the matter, chicken? I didn't know Blane had come back," my heart dived literally into my shoes.

What was I going to do? How would I tell Blane, for it never occurred to me that I shouldn't tell him? How could I keep Alice from hating me for what I knew I should have to do to Blane? And if Alice fired me, and Don's audition should prove unsuccessful, what on earth were we going to do?

Somehow, I managed to crawl through the day, my mind swinging like a pendulum from joy to fear, from fear to joy. But by five o'clock it was all on the sunny side again. I stopped off at the market on the way home and loaded my arms down with steak, vegetables, a rich, creamy cake. This was going to be better than the Sert Room, I told myself, a thousand times better—just Don and I and the food sizzling on the little kitchenette stove and kisses over the coffee, and the dishes waiting for Don to stop holding me.

I could have shaken the elevator man to make the lift go shooting up to the eleventh floor faster.

Then I was grinding the key in the lock and pushing the door open and won-

dering why Don hadn't turned on the light.

"Don, Don darling!" I called, and it was all as accustomed and natural as if Don and I had never been divorced and those four months had been stricken off the calendar by a single evening.

"Don," I called again, and as I pressed the switch, the living room blossomed into light. That look of its being lived in made my heart quicken, the cigarette stubs in the ashtrays, the morning papers strewn over the carpet. Never again would I scold Don for not doing his share of the straightening up.

"Don!" I called, and I went into the bedroom. I can still feel the hot blood rush to my cheeks at the sight of the suggestively rumpled bed, and then drain away as my eyes spotted the bit of notepaper stuck with one of my hairpins to the pillow. I was shaking by the time I had smoothed it out enough to read Don's almost illegible writing.

CONNIE DARLING:

I don't ever want to hurt you again. That's why I'm putting myself on probation this way. If I came back and we set up a conventional menage again, everything would be the same as before. So let's not, darling. Let's be brave and modern about things. When people love each other, that's the only thing that matters, not what others think of their actions. Only let me see you once in a while, Connie, and know you're there, and I'll be able to run an even keel again. Maybe, someday, you'll even be proud.

DON

I dropped to the edge of the bed and buried my face in icy fingers. So this was the end of all the rapture and ecstasy of the night before! Don making a pass at me as if we'd never been married, as if I'd been one of the casual girls he'd known.

And all at once I was hearing his voice, thick and tormented, and yet somehow sincere, "The trouble was I never should have married anyone, Connie—not even you, darling. I can't help it. That's how I'm made. It's that awful feeling of being tied. Oh, Connie, I love you so terribly and I've hurt you so much. It's—it's just that I was never meant to be a married man."

I began to shiver. And what of Blane? Did Don expect me to marry him after last night, marry Blane and go on meeting Don! Have repetitions of that shameful, wild evening. But I wouldn't! Don wouldn't reduce me from his wife to his mistress. I'd go away. I'd give up my job. I'd scrub floors for a living somewhere before I'd let Don desecrate our love.

That's what I thought, sobbing into the pillow where we'd lain, arms clasped, so short a time before—yet all the while something in me was calling for Don and I knew I was going to be defeated.

AND I was. It was only two weeks later that Don moved a few of his clothes back into our apartment. Not all, for he kept his own place, just enough so he could conveniently spend a night with me whenever the desire took possession of him.

Even now I sometimes hope I will awake to find it all a bad dream. But it

was no dream. Don had reduced me from a wife to a mistress, and even if I tried to excuse myself by insisting I was merely indulging the man I had married before God in a silly, romantic whim, from that day on I was never without a sickening sense of guilt.

Within a few months, that sense of guilt—more than my confession to Blane, my painful break with Alice, and the irksomeness of the job I finally landed selling chintz in a department store—was to bring me to the verge of a nervous breakdown.

People react differently to the same situation. While I wilted under the necessity for subterfuge, Don blossomed like a rose. For the first time in his life, he was flirting without hurting me by it. He even got himself a two-month radio contract with a year's option, and I told myself that now, at last, Don was standing on the threshold of success; and, to me, Don's success was the most important thing on earth.

Did I say I thought of Don as my husband? Well, that isn't exactly true. I thought of him the way he wanted me to think of him, as my lover. Evenings when I expected him, I'd put on a pair of coral lounging pajamas he'd brought me and pin a white flower in my dark hair.

There was always a strange excitement when he came into the room, even before he'd take me in his too adept arms. And if we were going to have dinner in, Don no longer let me cook it. He'd phone down to the restaurant and carefully prepare a couple of cocktails as if it were a rite.

I wonder now how I could have gone on believing that the day would come when Don would grow tired of playing house and would take on his duties again like a real, grown-up man. I looked forward to the day he would realize the silliness of preferring an imitation relationship to a genuine one, when he would come to me to beg me for marriage as a gift, not to confer it as a boon. I was sure, somehow, that only under such circumstances could a marriage between us be the adult, constructive relationship which I still imagined ours was going to be. Or maybe I was just rationalizing because that was the only way I could go on with Don—and I didn't know how to go on without him.

Nobody on earth can do things so at odds with her own nature and not pay for it. But when Dr. Furness wanted to send me to a psychiatrist because I grew more and more nervous, I put down my foot. There wasn't anyone I was going to tell my dreams to. Besides, I had only one, waking or sleeping—a secret one, that Don would come to his senses one day and legitimize our relationship into the marriage it always had been.

So far as I knew, for months he hadn't even been aware of any other woman. He was working hard. He was steadier than he'd ever been. Maybe all he needed was to test himself a little.

So far as I knew! And then, one afternoon, the bottom was to drop out of my world.

Blane, who if he had forgiven me had never quite forgotten me, often managed to be at Thirty-fourth Street just when I was getting out to lunch. There wasn't any harm in seeing that an old friend had

something more substantial than a cup of coffee, was there? Well, that warm May day I came out the employees' entrance, I was glad, as always, to see his sandy head and his warm, gray eyes again.

He steered me into a near-by restaurant and stared at me pityingly while I made a bad pretense of eating a hot lunch, and then suddenly, as if he had been having a real struggle with himself, he blurted out clumsily, "Connie, maybe I'm a dog to say the thing to you I purposely came down here to say, but I think I'd be a dog if I didn't. I know more than you think about you and Don. Jim Schaeffer's seen you closing down a few night clubs lately, and if I hadn't put the screws on him, he'd have blazed it over the *Sentinel*. And Jim Schaeffer's seen a few other things, too—"

Jim Schaeffer! That human ferret! I could feel the hot blood rushing all the way from the throat of my white blouse to my red straw hat. So Jim must have seen Don come out of the apartment mornings, and he'd told Blane, who was the last person on earth I could bear to know the truth about me.

"Honey," Blane was saying, and his voice was the sorriest I ever heard, "if you want to go back to Don, that's your business. But you're not happy. You're so thin! If I thought Don was on the level with you, I wouldn't butt in. But he's not, Connie."

SOMETHING in me tightened like a steel spring; the old, protective, maternal feeling I'd always had for Don. My voice was so hard it surprised even me when I snapped, "That's not true! Don's different from other people, that's all. He's really trying—he has a good job now. He's going places. People like you just can't understand Don."

Outside I must have looked hard as nails, but inside I was shaking with terror. It was as if I knew that Blane was going to tell me an awful truth; as if Blane would never have opened his mouth about Don unless he knew something concrete. And I was right. He leaned over suddenly and caught my hand in his.

"Connie," he said. "There's a little girl—just a kid—named Flo Terry, a receptionist down at Brantley's agency where the radio boys spend so much time. I wonder if she understands Don—or if she, too, thinks he's really on the level."

I'll never forget the way I knocked over that coffee cup. I did it pulling my hand away so quickly from Blane's. And when the waiter came and began mopping up and insisting it was nothing at all, I was glad. It gave Blane something to look at besides the wild expression I couldn't keep off my face.

It wasn't true, it couldn't be true, I kept telling myself over and over all afternoon while I handled a special sale crowd, and made mistakes, and took a fourth aspirin because my head was hurting so badly. Don hadn't looked at another woman since we'd been together again; he'd said so a dozen times. He said as long as he could come and go, as he pleased, there wasn't a man on earth who could be more faithful than he was.

I left the store early that afternoon, asking permission to get off because I felt ill. But I wasn't going home to bed. I was going up to Forty-seventh Street.

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There's a light-lunch stand right opposite Brantley's, and I went in there with a newspaper and pretended I was waiting for someone. I sat there, letting the coffee get cold in front of me and thought, "What's the difference between me and Jim Schaeffer?" And I answered myself bitterly, "Nothing, when you get so low as this! Gee, Connie," I said to myself, "you had the makings of such a nice girl. Yeah, but you met a fellow named Don—"

About five o'clock the radio people began leaving the building, and then, when I was just ready to give up, Don came out. He lit a cigarette and sort of sauntered up and down in front of the building as if waiting for someone. I sat there, watching him, the clean cut of his shoulders, his handsome profile under the wide fedora, the distinction with which his cheap clothes sat on his graceful body.

AND then it happened. She came out of the doorway, a young, blond girl who, even at that distance, looked pretty in a hard, bold way. She was wearing an imitation fur jacket that stopped short at the waistline of a swinging, flowered, too brief skirt. When she saw Don, she gave an excited little cry and he took off his hat with a flourish that was like something out of the movies. He was smiling at her; that warm, dipped-in-honey smile that I'd always considered my own special smile.

I'll never forget the way that hand of ice closed over my heart so painfully that I almost cried out. "If he kisses her, I'll die!" I was thinking.

But his arm just slid around her shoulder in an intimate squeeze that was a thousand times more eloquent than any casual kiss, and for one unbearable moment before the tears blinded me, I was able to see them fall in step together and walk, as if welded, toward Fifth Avenue.

Thus I came to see myself as the thing I was, a desperate woman flinging away her future, her self-respect, her peace of mind for a few kisses from a man who was destroying her—the way bald-headed men in the front rows smash up their families for lovely show girls whom at heart they despise. I saw myself no longer as the stabilizing factor in Don's life but as a slave to his love, a woman he would one day scorn for her very weakness.

In the weeks that followed, Don was more lavish with gifts than ever. He took me all over; never by any gesture did he suggest that he was interested elsewhere. One June evening there was a radio benefit for English children, and Don insisted I go with him. Rouged, fortified with a new dress, and quaking at meeting the friends who had known us when we were decently married, I went.

But it wasn't to meet our old friends that Don had obviously brought me. It was to meet Flo Terry, though I didn't know it then. It comes back to me now with strange significance the way he called the bleached, excited-looking girl in the tight black satin dress to our table and made her sit and drink with us. Flo—I recognized her at once—was pasty pale under the thick layer of foundation.

"Flo," Don said, "I want you to meet my wife, Mrs. Stafford."

Flo's mouth quivered a little and a

dogged look in her blue eyes behind their spiked lashes went like a knife to my heart. She was so young, I thought, so awfully young to get mixed up with anyone so ruthless as Don. And she was crazy about him. Anyone could see that.

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Stafford," Flo said again when she got up to leave us, but there was no conviction in that shaking voice.

Noting Don's inscrutable smile as she left, I asked incredulously, "Why on earth did you introduce me as your wife and not as Connie Riley, as you always do?"

Don took my hand and ran his finger tentatively across the pink palm. Then quickly he lifted it up to his lips.

"Because you are, darling," he said with that quicksilver smile of his. "Really are, I mean, Connie. Don't you know that?"

But I didn't know it. Sitting there with Don looking at me so amorously, I felt suddenly naked and exposed, and I began to shiver. I couldn't get out those words

Coming!

My Mother Didn't Know Me

She lived only for the day when she could stand before the woman who had borne her and say, "Here I am—the baby you gave away. Remember?" But when that day finally came, she realized her lips had to remain sealed. Read it in

April Secrets

On Sale February 20th

I wanted to say, "Remember—we're divorced!"

In July I saw that Don was getting into one of his old states again; that state that had always preceded one of his sudden disappearances. He was talking about bad breaks, and how much better off he'd be on the Coast. And all day and all night it seemed to me I went about with a burden that was more than I could bear. "If Don goes now, he'll never come back," I told myself. "I'm not his wife any more. I'm just a woman in a pair of coral pajamas. He doesn't even confide in me any more. He'll never come back, and I can't go on without him!"

Funny, how very little we know about ourselves, really! I thought he was giving me notice, and all the time it was a hundred dollars Don was worrying about—a hundred dollars he finally broke down and said he'd taken from petty cash at the broadcasting station and would have to repay if he didn't want to lose his contract, or go to jail, maybe. I never gave away a hundred dollars more happily. Looking back, I can see it was little enough to pay for the discovery that touch of Don's was to bring me—the discovery not only of Don's character, but of my

own. I should have realized Don was lying about why he needed the money. People are complicated beings and Don was unscrupulous only where women were concerned.

I was feeling real well that Thursday evening when I came home from the store, took a bath, and settled down with a mystery story.

And then in a shattering instant, the telephone obliterated all the peace. The voice that came over the wire was a strange one, hoarse and torn—a girl's voice.

"Mrs. Stafford? I don't know whether you remember me. Don—Mr. Stafford, I mean—he's not home, is he? I'm Flo Terry. Remember? Flo, the blond girl who works in Brantley's. Well, I've got to talk to you, Mrs. Stafford. Please, I got to! You're sure he's not there? Yes, I'll come right now."

I remember walking, stunned, bewildered, over to the mirror and looking at myself. Mrs. Stafford. What a long time it was since anyone had called me that—and with that undercurrent of frightened respect in her voice; a kid's voice, cracked as if she'd been crying over something. In my gray flannel bathrobe, my hair washed and loose around my shoulders, my face naked of make-up, I looked like no competitor in a romance. I felt suddenly uneasy. What was she coming to me for, I wondered. I couldn't give any pointers to a girl like her. I'll never know the answers, any of them.

And then Flo was standing in the doorway, looking into the pretty, decorator-planned room as if she were an outcast staring into a corner of heaven she might never dare to hope for. She had been crying. The rouge on her plump cheeks was mottled, and she looked younger than I remembered her. When I saw how her tensed white fingers clung as if for support to the foyer wall, I came quickly to her side.

"Mrs. Stafford," she gasped, "it's terrible what I got to tell you, but there's no other way. I been walkin' 'round and 'round in Central Park thinkin' how to tell you, and I've just got to say it right out. Mrs. Stafford, you'll have to divorce Don—I mean, Mr. Stafford. You'll just have to, Mrs. Stafford—because—because I'm going to have a baby, and that's the only way he can marry me."

I stood there, staring at her as if I had turned to stone. This mere child, I was thinking, was going to have Don's baby—and all the time he'd been telling me how he loved me. Yes, and telling her that he was married and tied and unable to do anything about it. Oh, the cad! What a fool I'd been not to have seen before what an unspeakable cad he was!

"Mrs. Stafford, you *will* divorce him?" She stood there, her eyes wide with fear and anticipation, as if she expected me to slap her pasty, quivering face. Then when the words, "You poor kid!" tore themselves off my numb lips, she moaned and folded up into a limp heap of pink fluff on the foyer floor.

LOOKING back now, I can calmly recall that awful night of revelation. I guess everything in the world has its saturation point, even such an unquestioning, crazy love as I had had for Don.

Always he had convinced me that he was the easy prey of sophisticated women who wouldn't let him alone—but this kid, this silly, ignorant kid was not so easy for him to explain.

As I sat beside the couch, forcing brandy down Flo's tight throat, I noticed she was hardly more than a baby herself. And when she opened her eyes and clung to me, incredulous and awestruck at my kindness, I could have wept with pity for all silly, gullible female creatures. But no longer for myself. The weakness had somehow seeped out of me, leaving me hard and strong and very sure of what I wanted to do to Don if only I could get my hands on him.

"You're so good, Mrs. Stafford!" the girl was whimpering. "You couldn't treat me better if you were my mother. I wish I didn't have to hurt you—but I can't help it. Don wanted me to have it done away with. He gave me a hundred dollars. But I can't, Mrs. Stafford. I'm scared. I knew a girl who died from that. And seventeen's too young to die." Her voice rose in a little hysterical scream.

Suddenly I was on my feet, standing over her, my fingers pressed into her cold shoulders. *A hundred dollars!* My hundred dollars that it had taken me months and months to save. Headaches and tired arms and hurting feet and no new clothes—just so Don might pay it off to some quack for putting a kid like that through an abortion—a kid who was only—

All at once I heard my voice in the still room, quiet and terribly full of meaning. "How old did you say you were, Flo?"

Her plump hand clapped over her white lips. "Please, Mrs. Stafford—you won't tell him? I said I was twenty. He was such a smart gentleman he'd never have looked at a kid of seventeen. I only added three years."

Of course! Anyone could see with half an eye that under the garish clothes and blatant make-up was a helpless, unsophisticated child. I dropped into the white leather chair and studied her dirtied, tear-stained face for a long, pitying moment. I felt a real affection for her, this girl who was going to even off the score for all women with Don Stafford. Then I said, smiling, "Now stop worrying, Flo. Stop worrying about anything. I'm going to give you some hot milk and a sleeping powder and put you to bed in my room. Don's going to marry you much sooner than you think."

WITH the strain of my interview with Flo over, and the girl tucked cozily in bed, I was suddenly tired, more tired than I had ever been in my life. I knew I was through with Don forever, and yet I felt no emotion, no amazement, no sorrow, no terror of the future that would have none of his quicksilver charm, his laughter, his perfect love-making. I knew that he would come home, because Don always came to me when he was in trouble; and if not for the girl inside, I would have sent him packing without a word. But even the anger I had felt for him seemed futile and unimportant. The only thing that was important was that now for the first time in my life I could see him clearly—not as a handsome, fascinating man of irresistible charm, but as a

greedy small boy, clinging to a woman's skirts, leaning on her strength, giving her for love the counterfeit coin of sex, and spouting his modern theories with the unseasoned ruthlessness of an adolescent.

"Connie," I said to myself. "You poor deluded fool—as if Don ever could have needed you—or any woman—or anything but his own reflection in a looking glass. Don's too in love with himself to ever need anybody except to use them!"

It was eleven o'clock when I heard the grinding of the key in the lock, and I didn't even look up. He came over and kissed the back of my neck and I sat there dully, wondering how a thing like that had ever had the power to twist my heart.

It's strange—and, in a way, wonderful—how a certain pattern seems to persist in life. Things come when you no longer want them. When you've outgrown them and they can't hurt you any more, they have a way of showing you how tawdry and unimportant the most poignant desires often are. I think I knew instinctively that now that I no longer wanted him, Don was going to offer himself. And I was right, for, the next minute, Don was kneeling before me, his arms about me, and he was saying, "Connie, let's stop playing house and make it real. You look so restful and domestic, Connie, in that gray wrapper. I got an offer for a job out on the Coast tonight, Connie. Let's go, darling. Let's get married and go. I'm tired, Connie. I want to start over."

I STARED down at Don's handsome head wearily. Oh, there was no use in being angry with him. He had never grown up. He probably never would. So long as he had a woman to run to, he would always run away from his responsibilities—the way he was ready to run away from Flo and her trouble now—the way he had run away from me when I needed him. Only now I didn't need him. He could never hurt me again. All I could ever feel for him from now on would be a pitying contempt that he should be such a poor imitation of a man.

"Don," I said quietly, "you're going to start over. Only not with me. Flo Terry's in there sleeping—and you're not going to run away from New York because Flo's going to have a baby—your baby—and you're going to marry her. You can't get out of this, Don. Flo's only seventeen."

Don stared at me the way a drowning man might look after a bit of rope that is slowly being withdrawn from his desperate clutch.

"You don't understand, Connie," he began pleading. "I'll do anything you say for the kid. I'll see her through. But you can't make me marry her. Not a girl like that, ignorant and bossy and jealous as hell. Besides, I don't love her. Connie, you can't do such a thing to me, not you, Connie. You're the only woman who ever understood me. You're my wife, Connie. You said you'd forgive me anything. Connie darling, after all, love's the thing that counts, and I'm trying to tell you I love you, Connie—"

I sat there, and Don's arms were around me, and his wet face close to mine, and the closer he tried to come to me, the further he seemed to get. Love's the thing that counts. Well, maybe it was, after all. With a real effort I pulled my-



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self out of Don's grasp, and got to my feet, sighing a deep, grateful sigh—grateful that at last I was free of his terrifying hold on me. I felt only indifference to his grief.

"Poor Don," I remember I said. "You'll have to stand on your own feet now. Maybe you do love me at last, though I doubt it extremely. But whether you do or don't, Don, no longer matters to me."

IT WAS not until Flo and Don were married and everything was settled that, like a green-bough that has been bent too far, I snapped. For weeks I went about crying, and finally I had to give up my job and go to board on a farm in Vermont.

There, during the long, quiet winter, I began to mend and get the courage to look honestly at my own life. I came to see that even if Don had been sincere, the conflict which any honest person would have to undergo in the maintenance of such a relationship would sooner or later

end disastrously.

Blane never stopped being my friend. He wrote me regularly, and when in January I came back to New York, healthier, stouter and better to look at than before, it was he who made Alice give me a second chance in the shop.

It's funny about Flo. I think she's going to be a good wife for Don. For one thing, she keeps a tight rein on him. As for me, she's set me up on a pedestal where I'm almost dizzy. I'm not afraid to see them because my past life is as far from me as the cocoon is from the caterpillar once it has become a butterfly. I had all I could do to keep her from calling her baby Connie Stafford. And every time I see something cute and pink, I make it a point to send it to her.

I've outgrown Don and his ideas, and I know that love without trust, without security, without mutual respect is the shoddiest substance on earth.

I've learned my lesson and I think Blane knows I've learned it. Dear Blane.

He's been so kind and patient. He has waited, as if he wanted me to be as sure of myself as he has always been of himself. Never by one word has he reminded me that there was a time he dreamed of being more than a friend to me.

But the last time I saw him, he made one cryptic remark and I'm pinning all my hopes on that.

"Do you remember the bible story, Connie, where Jacob labored for Rachel seven long years?" he asked, and when I asked why, he only smiled.

He only smiled, but deep in my heart something began to glow. I think I know what he meant.

Monday will be seven long years since the first day I came to Alice Gordon's shop—an ambitious, ignorant youngster—and smiled, without seeing them, into Blane's honest gray eyes. And Monday night we're going to have dinner together.

Oh, Blane, if you'll only ask me again! This time, I'm sure! I'll make you a wonderful wife!



Hero for a Day

(Continued from page 13)

"That's quite a story," I said, flattered at the admiration of this prominent man.

"You'll tell it to me tomorrow night, then," he urged. "We've a date."

All the next week we were chummy. I'll admit it was a pleasant feeling to be with a man whose mere entrance galvanized head waiters into feverish activity, for Lefty flung money around like water.

It was at the end of that week, when we were seated in one of the new night spots in Miami Beach, that Lefty said, "Pat, I think you're wasting your life. You'll never get more than peanuts working for this Runsun Mill. Now, if you're interested, I may be able to fit you into my organization. I think I've a good spot for you. No use saying more unless I know you're interested." Very deliberately he added, "The job I have in mind will pay you three C's a week."

Three hundred a week! No wonder I hesitated a moment before saying, "Thanks, Lefty, but I'm playing it straight."

"Boy Scout, eh?" Lefty laughed. "Well, you may be changing your mind one of these days. If you do, you can always find me in New York at the Club Forty-seven. I own the joint."

I found myself listening with only half an ear to what Lefty was saying, for a stunning brunette took the floor and began to sing. She had one of those torchy voices that do things to a man. I'd seen plenty of beautiful creatures but nothing to compare to her.

"Quite a gal, eh, Pat?" Lefty com-

mented. "Name's Cleone Martin. I've signed her to sing at the Club Forty-seven as soon as she finishes the season here. Which reminds me, I've a couple of things to tell her before I return to Chicago tomorrow."

I found myself half envying Lefty as he walked over to her at the conclusion of her two numbers. She welcomed him with a smile and they began dancing together. She came back to our table with him after the dance and Lefty introduced her. "Cleone said she'd like to meet a public hero," he chuckled, "particularly if he can dance."

That first moment I put my arms around Cleone, something happened to me. My blood started to sort of race through my veins and I felt my temples begin to throb. I could feel the answering pressure of her softly curved body as my arms tightened about her. For a brief, intoxicating moment before the music ended, her cheek brushed mine. No intimate caress had ever stirred me as deeply as this slight touch.

BACK at the table, Lefty insisted on ordering champagne to celebrate his last night in Miami. A haze began to steal over everything so that I was conscious only of Cleone's eyes, deep-set and smoldering; and that scarlet, tempting mouth.

Later, as we sped homeward in a cab, I was scarcely aware of Lefty's leaving, just nodding mechanically as he hopped out of the cab and said, "See Cleone home, will you, Pat? I've got some business here."

She slipped her arm through mine as we got out in front of her hotel, and I found myself nodding as she murmured something about a nightcap. She opened the door with her key, and put out her hand to flash on the light. At least, that's what I think she would have done if I hadn't caught her in my arms. I heard a sigh when her mouth lifted to mine—hot, sultry, demanding.

I awoke the next morning with a dull,

throbbing headache as if there were sledge hammers busily at work within my temples. Involuntarily I groaned as I sat up in bed. "Good morning, darling," a woman's voice beside me said. Cleone's smile was tender yet languorous as she reached out and fastened her lips upon mine in a long, passionate kiss.

But it couldn't drown out the voice of my conscience. Somehow I freed myself. "Cleone, you're pretty wonderful—and I'm not pulling the saint act—but I'm married," I said huskily.

"So what?" she said in that low, throaty voice of hers. "Lefty told me about that wife of yours who figured her job was more important than you. And anyway—I'm not asking you to marry me—yet," she laughed. "Though confidentially, I could imagine worse fates. You're quite a man."

"Thanks," I muttered. Then I grabbed up my clothing and ran into the bathroom. When I got out, she was sitting up in bed, her red lips smiling invitingly. "May as well kiss the girl good-by," she said softly. Then as she saw me flush she laughed, "Skip it, darling. But I'll expect you to-night."

"That's out," I said tightly, then I turned and ran out of the room, her low laugh following me.

I called myself all sorts of names as I walked slowly to my hotel. Cheating on Nora that way! It would never happen again, I swore.

Yet I found myself queerly restless as the evening came on. The memory of Cleone's burning caresses stayed with me constantly. I realized that if I stayed the week to which I was still entitled, my resolution would give way. That very night I started back to Chicago.

It was evening when I reached our apartment. I hadn't thought Nora would be back from New York so soon, but she flung herself into my arms as I entered. "I've

missed you terribly, Pat," she whispered.

I had intended to come clean about my betrayal of our marriage vows, but I just couldn't with her cuddled in my arms, particularly when she began weeping softly.

"Ho, there," I said. "Why the Niagara? Here I am a week ahead of schedule."

"I'm so glad," she confessed. "Oh, Pat, do you think the Runson Mills will really give you a decent job—one on which—we can live?"

For a moment I didn't get it. "Oh, I think so—why, sure," I yelled. "Don't tell me you'll give up your job, honey."

"If you make even fifty a week, I will," she said slowly. "That's about the least three can get along on." Then she was crying and laughing in my arms. "I've been so worried, Pat. So afraid that Mr. Black might just have been talking loosely and we couldn't afford a baby."

That night we were closer than we had been in years. Nora was as loving and tender as a woman could be, all thrilled at the thought of having a child.

I phoned Black first thing in the morning. At first he couldn't seem to place my name, then he recognized it and his voice warmed up. "I'd like to see you about that job you promised me," I said eagerly.

"Job? What job?" he sounded kind of cold, but finally told me to come around at four that afternoon, adding, "You were a copywriter, weren't you? Of course all our advertising is done through an agency, but I'll check with them."

I was on edge by the time I saw him. Here I had been figuring the job was waiting for me, and he seemed to have forgotten all about me!

I forced myself to greet the heavily built man with smiling deference, but the smile faded as he said bluntly, "Stacey, I've checked with our advertising agency. Unfortunately they're overstaffed, but they've promised me that the very first opening will be yours."

"But—how about—my working here—in the mill?" I blurted out.

"Frankly, I don't know where you would fit," he said smoothly, his eyes avoiding me. "Now, if you were a chemist—even an accountant—"

"But I've just got to have a job," I pleaded desperately. I told him then about Nora and the baby we were going to have.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But I haven't got a single opening—"

I blew up then, told him a few things, and slammed out of the office. Gratitude! Just five weeks ago he had been falling all over himself because I had saved him eight thousand bucks.

It didn't pay to be decent! That was a phrase Lefty had used once. Did it pay to be on the level, I asked myself bitterly. Honesty was a luxury I couldn't afford, not with Nora having a baby. It was my job as a man to get the money we needed—no matter how. Anything was better than to come home and meet the bitter disillusion in Nora's eyes, know that I was dooming her to the abortionist, for she had to keep on working! Why, it was murdering my own kid! A man had a right to do anything sooner than that, I told myself—and if Lefty's offer still held—

I made straight for the Club Forty-seven. It was a swanky joint, the sort of place which doesn't get much of a play until about midnight. The head waiter

looked me over carefully when I asked for Lefty, then took my name and left. A tough-looking youngster came and led me to the floor above, where Lefty had his office.

The racketeer shook my hand as if I were a long lost friend. I didn't waste time. "What's your proposition?" I asked bluntly.

His grayish-green eyes studied me carefully. "I happened to see that newsreel of the police commissioner congratulating you when you were in the hospital. Remember he said there wasn't a cop in the city who didn't feel grateful to you?"

I laughed harshly. "Yeah, so I won't get any traffic tickets. So what?"

"I doubt if there's a cop or a dick in this city who doesn't know your face. Usually that would be a handicap in my line. But when they're grateful to you, figure you're a public hero—why, that's different." Lefty laughed quietly. "Here's the setup. I've got a sweet organization functioning in the drug racket, but I need a man I can trust to pick up the stuff and make the important deliveries. I need a man the police won't suspect, because you're liable to have as much as fifty grand worth in your cab. They'd never think of stopping you and searching your cab, right?"

"I suppose so." My lips were so dry I had to moisten them with my tongue. Dope! I hadn't thought of that, yet why not? What real harm would I be doing? If I didn't deliver it, somebody else would. It was the old cotton wool with which I was trying to muffle my conscience. I knew I was doing a contemptible thing, but I wasn't going to let Nora down!

MY misgivings disappeared when I saw the light in Nora's eyes. "A hundred a week as Black's assistant," I told her, then she flew into my arms.

"Oh, darling, darling, everything's going to be so wonderful!" she sobbed. "I've been worrying all day."

"I told you that worrying is my job." I cupped her chin in the palm of my hand. Meeting her clear blue eyes wasn't easy. "And I don't want you worrying in the future even if I come home late nights. Black's told me he's a bit of a night owl. Likes to come to work in the afternoon and stay half the night."

That was the alibi I prepared for the fact that sometimes I'd have to make night deliveries. The work, if you can call it that, was easy enough. Just a matter of distributing the drug to the peddlers who'd pass it on. Two of Lefty's men would usually be in the cab with me, usually Twisty Davis and Al Turner, two New York gunmen who weren't known to the Chicago police. They used to get a kick out of the way the cops greeted me. "Why, the saps treat Pat like he was the mayor of this town," Twisty reported to Lefty after our first expedition.

That first month everything went like a charm. I had eight hundred dollars in my bankroll and a couple of hundred in the joint account Nora and I opened. She insisted on working a few more months to give us some surplus for emergencies. I couldn't tell her I was putting by enough for that. In a way, it was better she should be kept busy, I figured. There was less chance that way of her ever accidentally checking up on me. I lived in dread she might call the mill someday, though I had

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warned her Black didn't like employees to receive personal calls during working hours. Maybe by the time she quit working, I might have enough saved to buy an interest in some established advertising agency. I'd quit the racket then, I told myself, forgetting it was a lot easier to get in than to get out.

I don't know how long I would have drifted along this way before the pay-off. It was Cleone's return that second month which started things popping. I had sort of forgotten that she had been engaged to sing in the Club Forty-seven. When I stepped into Lefty's office that night to report on the day's deliveries, I had no idea she was here. "Wait here a moment, Pat." He had laughed, then left me.

The door behind me opened so softly I didn't hear it. The next moment a soft, fragrant figure was in my arms, and hot velvety lips were pressed against mine. I'm not saying I didn't kiss Cleone back before I released her.

I was shaking with the need of her even as I pushed her back. "Hello, Cleone. When did you get back?" I tried to seem casual.

"Today," she said, her dark eyes tender yet smoldering. "What was the idea of walking out on me in Miami?"

"I guess you've forgotten I have a wife," I said briefly.

"I haven't forgotten that," she said levelly, her black eyes glowing. "And I haven't forgotten that night. It was something very special," she said meaningfully. "Wasn't it?"

I flushed at the memory of that passionate night. "Sure," I said, "but we've got to forget that. If I weren't married and living with my wife, things would be different."

"Yes, they would," she said slowly. Then she came closer and put her arm on mine. "I never thought I'd ever be stuck on a man the way I am on you, Pat," she said. "I may as well confess I was nice to you at first because Lefty wanted me to be. I guess he figured it might induce you to join up. He even figures he played his cards right because you're here! But the joker in the deck is I fell for you instead of you for me! So what are we going to do, Pat darling?"

I looked away guiltily. "I don't know," I mumbled. "Except—we've just got to stay away from each other."

"Because you're afraid to trust yourself near me." There was triumph in Cleone's husky voice. "That's all I wanted to know, Pat darling. You're my man as I'm your woman, even if we met a little late. We'll just have to rearrange the cards, that's all."

There was no making her understand it was useless. Cleone couldn't believe that I really loved Nora. If I did I couldn't react to her as I did, she declared triumphantly. She laughed as I denied it, for it was obvious enough that I craved her caresses as much as she wanted mine. She couldn't or wouldn't understand that it wasn't proof I loved her. I couldn't stop the blood from rushing more swiftly through my veins at the dark-haired girl's touch, but I could and did keep myself from even kissing her after her return.

Cleone grew more and more sulky as I refused to weaken. As I look back now, I realize she was desperately in love with me.

Otherwise she would never have done what she did.

I came home one evening for supper to find a white-faced Nora at the table. "You're not looking well, darling," I told her. "Maybe you'd better quit your job right now instead of working any more."

"Quit my job!" she echoed shrilly. "Be dependent upon your dope distributing! Or rather, upon what you choose to turn over to me after giving most of it to that woman—your mistress! Pat Stacey, I hate you! Hate you!"

"So Cleone's been here!" I broke in grimly. "I might have known this would happen sooner or later!"

"Yes, she's been here," Nora said shrilly. "If she hadn't, I might not have known the sort of man I was married to. A criminal!"

Caprice

She filled his life with laughter

And devastating pain.

She would send him from her

And call him back again.

She was always frivolous,

Perhaps a little mad.

She laughed in time of sorrow

And cried when she was glad.

It was just a game she played.

She often used to say,

"One mustn't be predictable,

Lest his interest stray!"

But after he had left her

Finally, for good,

Her tears were real—her story

was:

"He never understood."

—Frances Manette White

A cheat!" Hysterically she raved on, "I'm going to leave this house tonight. You'll never see your child!"

"No, you're not! I want that child," I said tensely.

"Don't you worry, Pat Stacey. You'll have a child—hers," she screamed. "Isn't that enough?"

"If Cleone said she's having a child, she's lying!" I asserted. "You've got to listen to me," I pleaded.

SOMEHOW I spilled the whole sordid story. "I've made a mess of things, but I do love you," I blurted out helplessly.

There was a dull, glazed look in Nora's eyes, and her face was the color of wax. All the life seemed to have been drained from her body.

"I'll quit the racket," I pleaded. "I'll do anything—but don't leave me, darling. You're all that matters to me."

I thought that I had lost, for she kept shaking her head. Helplessly I rose to my feet.

Then she was whispering, "It was my fault. I should have gone with you to Florida. Oh, Pat—Pat!"

With a great surge of thankfulness I cradled her head against my chest even as she whispered, "What are we going to do?"

"First thing, I'm seeing Cleone," I said grimly. "Oh, I'm just going to make her admit she was lying about—" I explained as Nora started to protest. "Then I'm seeing Lefty—telling him I'm checking out of the racket. We've almost a thousand dollars put away, enough to see us through until I land an honest job."

I made a beeline for Cleone's hotel, but she was out when I arrived. I had better luck with Lefty at the club.

"Lefty, I'm quitting the racket," I told him bluntly.

His face darkened as he exclaimed incredulously, "Why, you can't do this to me, man!"

"I've got to, Lefty!" Swiftly I explained about Nora. "It's quit or lose my wife. So I'm quitting right now!"

Those greenish-gray eyes studied me coldly for a minute, then a smile came to his lips. "I can see that you're pretty well set, Pat, so I won't try to talk you into changing your mind," he said smoothly. "I'll just ask you to make a couple of deliveries tonight." As I started to protest, he said sharply, "Pat, I'm not being unreasonable. There are plenty of men in my position who wouldn't take your walking out on them quite so nicely. You deliver this package to Sandy Robinson, then come back. You'll make a couple more deliveries then with Twisty and Al. When you get back, I'll have transfer papers ready for you to sign. The cab's in your name, remember."

"Okay, Lefty." It was little enough, I thought resignedly. What did one night more or less matter? I had expected him to be pretty nasty.

Sandy's cafeteria was well over on the other side of town, and it was almost midnight before I returned. Lefty's black custom-built sedan was parked near the club, I noticed, as I pulled my cab up before the club. I was just about ready to get out when Cleone jumped into the rear of the cab.

"Pat, get going!" she said tensely, her face white as a sheet.

"Where to?" I snapped angrily. "Do you want to tell some more lies to my wife?"

"Pat! Pat! Step on the gas!" she pleaded. "Twisty and Al will be out here in a minute. Don't you understand—you can't quit this racket except in a wooden box! You know too much—the names of all the contact men, the distributors. I overheard Lefty telling Twisty and Al to take you for a ride."

That was the minute I saw the two New York gunmen come to the door of the cafe. As they saw me, I saw Twisty look meaningfully at Al, then throw his cigarette away and start for my cab.

I stepped on the gas then, and the cab shot forward. I heard Twisty yell, "Hey, Pat, wait a minute!" But I was through

playing the sucker, I who'd been dumb enough to think Lefty would let me check out on my own terms. I'd have to get Nora right away and leave town, I thought desperately, as my car shot along.

"Thanks for the tip, Cleone!" I shouted.

She clung to the front seat, her lips close to my ear. "I'm sorry for what I did," she said. "You see, I didn't know that your wife was going to have a baby or I wouldn't have done it. I swear!" Then suddenly she shouted, "Pat! They're after us!"

I gave her the gas then, but the car in back of us was built for speed. There wasn't time to think, but I knew my only chance to shake them off was the curves. I took them at nearly sixty miles an hour, my brakes shrieking as I jammed them on the last split second. In and out of those deserted streets I sped, handling my car like a madman. I think I'd have shaken them if they hadn't started shooting.

They must have been using silencers on their guns, for I didn't hear anything until Cleone screamed aloud in anguish. Just as I twisted around to see what had happened to her, my right front tire collapsed. At the speed I was making, that blowout was fatal. Even as I wrestled with the wheel, I knew I was a goner. The car crashed into the lamp post on the sidewalk, and I felt myself sailing through space. Then the lights went out.

There isn't much more to my story. I was lucky coming out of that spill with just a broken arm, but Cleone wasn't so fortunate.

Except for the killing of that lovely girl,

Love on His Terms

(Continued from page 21)

Mac was the center of a crowd, himself—a political rally crowd excited by a new candidate for mayor, a candidate who seemed to be a bit young and rawboned to be recklessly kicking the legs from under the party now in office. Probably Mac didn't look at it that way. He was calm, not doing any shouting. He believed in a few things, and he said so. He had a list of authenticated complaints about the party in office, and he said those, too. The crowd cheered, objected, hissed, and clapped. But he had their attention. He had mine, too.

I leaned toward Uncle Rolly who had coaxed me into accompanying him to the rally because he was backing Mac's campaign. "Could I meet him?" I whispered.

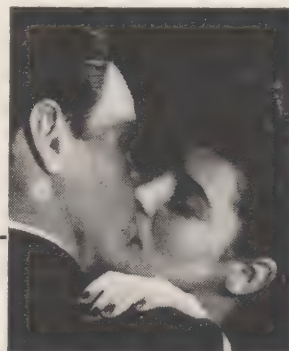
Afterward, Uncle Rolly was to mop his brow as he did his difficult explaining to the family. "How'd I know she was going to fall for him? Couldn't blame her for wanting to get a closer look at him. He's going to get somewhere—if it's only assassinated."

You don't need moonlight and roses to fall in love; I found that out. There was rain blowing into the dim school corridor where I first came face to face with Mac. I was jostled by raincoats, umbrellas, heavy shoulders. At first, Mac didn't even see us.

I might have kept my mouth shut in spite of everything. It was the need of avenging her which made me talk. Twisty and Al are doing a life stretch for her murder, and Lefty is doing a ten-year Federal rap for his part in the drug racket. His laugh rang out when the judge sentenced me to three years, but it faded out quickly when the white-haired jurist added, "But in consideration of your past excellent record, as attested by this letter from the police commissioner, and the fact that you were driven into this career by the wish to provide for your pregnant wife, plus your services to the State in breaking up this drug ring, I am suspending sentence, Pat Stacey."

"We're not through yet!" Lefty hissed as he was being led away by the court officer. The veneer of culture which had so intrigued me at first was gone, and he snarled and cursed like any cheap rat as he was hustled along.

His threats don't worry me, though I know there is genuine danger of the underworld someday tracing me. My only concern is making a living for my wife and little son. We're living in a small New England town just about managing to make ends meet. I hope my townsmen and neighbors will never know that they have a convicted felon in their midst, who, but for the kindness of the judge, would be behind bars. And I hope that my story may keep some other man or woman from embarking upon a criminal career, no matter what the motive. There is no end which justifies that means.



He was warning one chap, "If you misquote me again in that paper of yours, Carruthers, I'll know you did it on purpose."

When Uncle Rolly introduced him, he was charming—briefly, politically charming, I realized with a stab of incredulity. "How do you do, Miss Anders." He was interested in a talk with Uncle Rolly down at campaign headquarters after they left me on my doorstep! He couldn't see how Uncle Rolly had interpreted his speech as mud slinging; it had been only the truth. He spent the whole ride home talking about contracts and the municipal debt until it was time for him to remember to say he'd been glad to meet me.

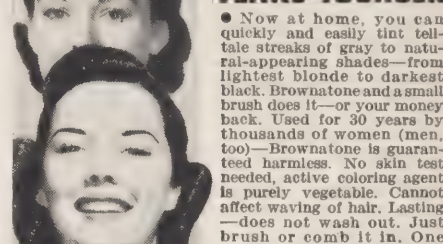
Municipal debt! He was dull, I told myself, when I was at home again, staring at my flaming cheeks and angry eyes in the hall mirror. I was breathless. Most men would have figured out a way to get rid of Uncle Rolly instead of getting rid of me. The Eastern Division paying contracts! I kept thinking of him. He was still so like a small boy. He had one of those



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long-jawed, angular, animated faces you had to look at even when he was talking about taxes and curbstones.

I saw Mac again, of course. The way I followed him around, it'd have been a miracle if I hadn't been lucky once in a while. Uncle Rolly was a godsend. He was always at rallies, always at campaign headquarters. I went with him whenever I could manage. I went out of my way to charm people who could invite me places where Mac was going.

It was hard work, heartbreaking work. I'd never had to fight to attract a man before. Everything seemed against me.

Mac was far more absorbed in the outcome of the election than in the color of the eyes of the girl who sat next to him at a dinner. Besides, it was nothing short of a miracle when I did get to sit next to him. Most of the time, I couldn't even get near him. Worse—there was another girl.

I couldn't see what Marjory Howorth had that I didn't have. She was no beauty. There were times when her indifference to clothes and make-up robbed her of even ordinary prettiness. Marjory was supposed to be aiding Mac's campaign in a secretarial capacity. I'd have given anything on earth to believe it was only that. Sometimes I was driven to a frenzy of jealousy and fear.

I'd see them talking together down at headquarters, Mac leaning half across the table where Marjory would be working, talking earnestly with her, arguing with her. Marjory had fluffy brown hair that looked as if nothing except having a comb drawn through it had ever happened to it. She had brown eyes, a good figure. Men wouldn't look at her twice. I couldn't see how Mac could search her out in a group, talk to her, listen to her as he never listened to me. I was desperate.

"Nita," Aunt Janet said one evening when I had put down the telephone and was sitting there, hating Mac, "that Laner person—even if he is to be our next mayor—doesn't rate four phone calls a day. It's not like you, darling. It definitely looks as if you're chasing him."

I WAS. I hadn't known I could be that way about anyone. Feverish, frantic, not caring about pride or anything else. I snatched at little things, made opportunities where there weren't any, blinded myself, gritted back the things that hurt. When Mac drove me home that night, Marjory Howorth's green raincoat was in the car. That didn't stop me from finding an excuse to see him again, pinning him down to it. When I telephoned headquarters, and they said he couldn't talk to me right then, I telephoned again and again. When I knew Mac was expected at a certain place and time, I was there, too—waiting.

I ignored other dates. I wasn't such a good teacher any more. I wasn't the same person, for that matter. People noticed. I could have screamed at the family's well-meant, anxious questions. Sometimes I did scream. I'd got past the place where I cared what people thought.

Marjory Howorth knew how it was, of course. She put as many spokes in my wheel as she could. She could always remind Mac of a previous engagement. She knew him well enough to suggest bluntly that if he had any time to spare, it might be a good idea if he went home and found out if he could still sleep. Marjory looked tired all

the time. She often wore the same sweater and skirt two or three days in a row. Sometimes when she saw me with Mac—lipsticked, curls brushed, wearing one of the pastel wools I bought that fall—a bright color would flare into her cheeks, and I would read hatred in her eyes.

It was Marjory's attitude that told me I was making an impression on Mac. Otherwise, I'd hardly have known. His way of falling in love was something new to me. Other men had been jealous, possessive, adoring, and had called me morning, noon and night to make sure I was still thinking of them. I'd broken my engagements to them for less than Mac's attitude toward me. It wasn't love, I told myself bitterly. I'd have to teach him to love me. He didn't know what love was.

It seemed to me I grew on Mac like a habit. He saw me often; he became accustomed to seeing me. If I wasn't there, he missed me. Sometimes he missed me enough to seek out my company. Just as often, he remembered it was just as well; he had to go and see someone about the paving contracts for Precinct Four, Ward Five, anyway.

BUT he could kiss me. There was something unpremeditated, almost rough, about Mac's love-making. He could blot out the stars, send the clear autumn nights receding into misty unreality when he held me in his arms, pressed his mouth to mine. He could blurt out awkwardly, boyishly, "I love you. I love you!"

And, next day, he could make me wonder if it had all been a dream. He preferred to talk about the election, the last political editorial in the *Press*, the curbstones and municipal sewers, and heaven knows what! Any summons from campaign headquarters could end one of our evenings together almost before it began. It seemed never to occur to him that I might be hurt.

I couldn't feel sure of him, couldn't feel that he loved me as I wanted to be loved and had a right to be loved by the man I married. Though I'd known him less than two weeks, I loved him so fiercely that I wanted to be more important to him than anything else on earth.

We had talked of marriage—confidently, optimistically—laughing in each other's arms, at first. Then, there were those misunderstandings—near quarrels, worse than quarrels because we could never really talk them out—those times when he was too busy to see me—but not too busy to see Marjory Howorth. When I accused him of neglect, his patience didn't extend to the gentle cajoling I'd known in my other love affairs. If he didn't get downright mad, he was quite apt to walk away and philosophically wait for me to arrange a reconciliation. I always did, too. And when I did, intuition told me not to bring into the discussion the name of Marjory Howorth.

I wasn't happy. For real happiness, you need security. I was getting thin, nervous, impatient with my kindergarten class and my anxious family as well. The solicitude of the family made Mac's indifference seem almost brutal.

If Mac noticed that I was losing weight, it didn't seem to occur to him that he had anything to do with it. My moods were utterly lost on him. If I didn't want to see him—all right, next time then. If I wanted to subside into unhappy silence, he was glad

of a chance to talk to me about a million things I didn't understand. If I gave way to impatience, Mac became impatient, too. Why did I bother with him if I felt that way about him, he'd demand.

Why did I bother with him? You find out, when it's really love, how much you can take without saying, "Go away." As the days passed and the conviction grew upon me that Mac couldn't really love me and treat me as he did, I was obsessed with the fear of losing my hold upon him. Other women were interested. Mac was furious when the local paper called him the "ladies' candidate"—but it was true. And there was always Marjory Howorth. The only answer was marriage. In my desperation, it began to seem to me that only marriage could end the misunderstandings between us, make Mac mine once and for all.

And it looked as if I could only dream about that, too. Mac didn't like the idea of marrying while his future was a thing that depended upon election day, and with his campaign speeding toward a climax, I scarcely even saw him. From his excited five-minute interviews with me, I knew that the older, established party in office was fighting back with all the weapons at its command. Mac was making speeches, correcting false statements. He looked haggard, hungry. If he snatched five minutes with me, he had difficulty in keeping awake. While I was still in his arms, he'd mutter something about losing ground in Ward Three.

I didn't care about Ward Three. I hated the crowded auditoriums, the smoke-filled club rooms, and everything else that took Mac away from me. More than all, I hated Marjory Howorth.

In those last days of Mac's campaign, Marjory and I came as near to open enmity as two women ever come. She was standing between Mac and me, and I knew now she was doing it deliberately. She saw Mac every day; she always knew where to find him, always knew his plans. And she had the power to keep that knowledge from me!

Marjory's voice rebuffed me over the telephone; she was not at liberty to name Mac's whereabouts—not to anyone. Her authority stopped me at the smoky, untidy outer office of campaign headquarters. "Mr. Laner left word that he didn't want to be disturbed. He mentioned no exceptions, Miss Anders."

I always vowed I wouldn't give her a chance to snub me again, yet always came back to the place where the chance of seeing Mac counted more than anything else. He might be forgetting me. He might be interested in another woman—

THAT's how it was that autumn night one week before election day. I had hardly seen Mac in days. Our moments together had been snatched intervals interrupted by a telephone call or a frantic summons from here or there. I had been bitterly disappointed, indignant. Mac had rushed away, leaving helpless apologies hanging in mid air. He had telephoned once when I had been away from home. One day when, determined not to miss him again, I had stayed home, he dropped in at my kindergarten. Everything in the world apparently against me, I'd telephoned wildly, followed him on a futile trail from City Hall to a broadcasting station, then to somebody's office.

It was seven of that wet, cold evening when I came into campaign headquarters. I knew Mac was there, for I'd seen his car outside. But the door of the back office was closed. A group of men were smoking, working over voting lists in a dim corner. Marjory was working, too; she looked gray with fatigue. When I told her I knew Mac was there and intended to see him, Marjory said I wasn't going to see him.

She stood up beside her work table, her back against the door of Mac's office. She looked ready to fight. But she wasn't alone in that.

"I intend to see Mac!" I hadn't meant to raise my voice, but the men in the corner looked up. I felt my face flame, my whole body tremble.

"You're not seeing him," Marjory said grimly. "You've interrupted and distracted him ever since you've known him. If losing this election for him has been your game, you've been doing all right. But you've gone as far as you're going. If you get past this door, it'll be over my dead body."

One of the men in the corner said gently, warningly, "Girls, girls!" but I didn't care.

"I'll get past that door," I cried, "but before I do, we'll settle one thing. Mac is marrying me. And your interest in his career stops dead at his private life. Understand?"

It might have ended in a hair-pulling match. I was mad enough. So was Marjory, I think. But before either of us could get in another word, the door behind Marjory opened, and Mac stood there. He must have heard everything; he couldn't have helped hearing. He looked from Marjory to me. There was a dead silence. One of the men dropped a pencil and it rolled noisily across the floor. Mac reached for his hat. His face was so grim he frightened me. He went toward the door, and I followed him. We left Marjory standing there with a tense excitement on her face.

She thought I had lost him. So did I. I'll never forget that night. It was raining. The election advertisements loomed, big and black and white, beneath misty street lights. Mac drove silently. I sat there, shaken by the fear that the next words between us might end everything forever. But Mac said nothing until we were in the darkness of the drive beside my father's house. He turned off the ignition, and looked at me.

"I wish I could wring your neck," he said between his teeth.

I began to cry, then—from hysteria and relief. No man bothers to wring your neck when he's lost interest in you.

"I only wanted to see you," I cried, clinging to him. "How can you say you love me—if you don't understand that?"

His hands closed on my shoulders, sent an electric thrill through me even as he held me away from him.

"I love you, Nita," he said soberly, "in a way you don't seem to understand. Since I've known and loved you, every plan and dream I've ever had has become ten thousand times more important than it was before. Winning that campaign isn't just an ambition with me any more. It's something else. I've got to be somebody you can be proud of. For your sake, I've got to be the best that's in me, go as far and as high as I can go. Can't you understand that? Can't you see that if you can't help me, if

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you aren't interested in the things I want to do for both of us together, I'm going to wonder if you really love me as you ought to love the man you marry?"

He'd never talked to me like that before. I felt the tears press against my eyelids.

"Mac, I want to help you," I whispered. "I didn't want to distract you, hurt the campaign. But when you stay away from me, I can't help wondering, worrying. If we were married, if I knew that, whatever happened, we couldn't lose each other—"

"You're sure of that?" he interrupted. "Nita, if only I thought so! God knows, I want to marry you. If marrying you tomorrow or the next day would end all this misunderstanding—why don't we do it?" he finished impulsively.

Shaken by my unexpected victory, half-hysterical with happiness, I was close in his arms again, his lips against my tear-wet cheek.

"It's all I want," I whispered brokenly, "just to be sure of you."

I thought I'd won. I thought fiercely, "Everything will be different now. He's mine. No one, nothing, can take him away from me." Well, marriage isn't a miracle. It doesn't change people and situations into what they can never become. Most people learn that eventually. I learned it fast.

MAC and I were married exactly twenty-four hours before the polls opened on election day. The newspapers went wild. Mac's campaign workers were thrown into a bedlam of apprehension and anxiety. A would-be mayor who'd get himself married at the climax of his campaign! The boys at headquarters shoved their cigars back into

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their mouths, went furiously to work trying to gauge public opinion. Marjory Howorth telephoned, consulted lists. Her eyes were heavy, her lips white.

"It's our wedding day," I pleaded with Mac. "You can't leave me."

"I'll choke you," Mac said cheerfully. He was happy. But he wasn't any different from yesterday. He didn't want to hold me in his arms, be alone with me in our new right to love each other. He wanted to tell me about the unscheduled radio speech he was to make that night. He didn't say anything about the tears that kept starting to my eyes as he gave me a quick kiss and put me into a taxi for home.

I spent our wedding night at my father's house. Mac made his radio speech and telephoned casually that he had to drop in at campaign headquarters afterward. He started an eager explanation about drafting an ad in denial of a misstatement made in his opponent's last speech. I only half listened. I was crying.

He didn't come home that night. Next morning, I found him still at headquarters, stretched out asleep on one of the benches that lined the wall. Two or three of the boys were there, snoring noisily. Marjory came in with coffee in paper containers. Her white blouse was fresh and her hair combed, but she looked as if she'd been crying.

Mac told me to come along to the back office while he splashed water onto his face and hair. He didn't say anything about neglecting me. He stood there, blinking water out of his eyes and went into an eager explanation of his handling of "Toller's blasted lies." Gaily, as if he didn't hear them, he stifled my reproaches with kisses, swung me around, rumbled my hair.

"Get out of here," he said, "and stop distracting me. I'm going out to win this war. And don't forget to vote for me or you'll get the first beating of your married life."

When I asked him if he loved me, he said dejectedly it looked as if he were going to lose Ward Three. When I begged him to come home for lunch with me, he answered by eagerly reading something in a newspaper, and rushing away.

NEVER shall I forget election day. After voting, I sat by the radio at home and listened to election speculations. They confused me. I couldn't tell who would win. Anyway, all I wanted was to see Mac. Afraid to miss him if he phoned, I didn't leave the house. He did telephone me once, but someone called him away from the phone. Once that afternoon, he sped past the house and waved.

The family were with me. If Mac won, they were going to decide I hadn't thrown myself away altogether. That evening, when returns began coming in and it began to seem that that might happen, the announcer said, "Laner has been steadily piling up votes." When I called headquarters, the place was a madhouse of excitement. The family fussed because I hadn't eaten dinner. I watched the clock. Finally the polls had closed. Hours later Mac telephoned again.

"I'm at headquarters," he said. "Why aren't you down here, you little welsher. A heck of a wife you are. I'll send Uncle Rolly for you."

It was bedlam at headquarters; noise, people swarming in and out, shouting, tele-

phones ringing. I had to fight for Mac's attention. People kept coming between us, talking to him. I clung to his arm. A wild, frenzied shout went up, broke into hoarse cheers that shook the building. "He's in!"

They wouldn't let us alone. They took our picture together, asked us questions. Blinded by lights, deafened by voices, shaken by the vibration of handshaking and back-slapping, I tried to make Mac hear me. He had promised that the moment the election results were known, we would start on our honeymoon. Now he said we couldn't just walk out like that.

He was disheveled, feverishly tired. But he laughed when a blonde leaped out of the crowd and kissed him. Later he threw his arm across Marjory Howorth's shoulders and said she was the best boss a man ever had. I remembered what Marjory had tried to do to me. I couldn't help the tears that sprang to my eyes.

"Mac, please."

I DIDN'T forgive him on our honeymoon; he didn't ask me. He made ardent, abandoned love to me. But when I tried gently to explain how unhappy he'd made me, he fell asleep and slept until he woke up joyfully, remembering that he'd won the election. I was beginning to hate that election. I avoided saying things that would make Mac remember he was mayor. When he wanted to lie in my arms and talk taxes and municipal salaries, I was affronted and I let him know it.

He laughed, but he still wanted to talk politics. He'd cajole me into good humor and then start off on his old taxes all over again. It was slow torture to me. I couldn't—I wouldn't—share his attention with anyone or anything! But there was nothing I could do about it.

Our honeymoon lasted only three days. Max had an urgent telegram from home. He explained it to me.

"Toller's going to leave the city up to its nose in debt when he goes out of office—if we let him get away with it. We have to get an injunction against him, prevent his handing out any more contracts."

I didn't understand. I didn't try. Over my heartsick protests, Mac told me all the things he would do to Toller. He threatened laughingly, "You pack your lace-trimmed belongings right now, or I'll make you leave 'em here."

For a while, he kept on with his teasing, indulgent attitude. It didn't do any good. I suppose there was nothing that would have done any good. I had to learn that I couldn't have him on my terms. Until I learned—

Well, from the moment he took office, Mac had an uphill job on his hands. He was the youngest mayor in the city's history. He was fighting a combination that had had a strangle hold on local politics for a decade. Those two things alone were enough to open him to constant, grueling doubt, criticism and suspicion.

He had to fight, and fight hard. He worked all day, part of every evening. At first he came home eagerly, eating gratefully anything that could be assembled for a hasty meal, anxious to talk about affairs at City Hall, to tell me the day's developments.

But when I said I didn't want to hear about City Hall, the trouble began. He wouldn't listen to my protest that City Hall

had separated us all day; why couldn't we think only of each other tonight? He was apt to be impatient, increasingly apt to be sarcastic.

"All right then, let's sit down and hear you tell what all the girls wore at Mrs. Prendible's reception."

Mac had a positive genius for making my conversation seem trivial. His attitude infuriated me, because I'd always been used to the family's undivided attention.

If I asked him whether to wear the beige crepe or the gray wool to the civic luncheon, he would most likely say cheerfully that he didn't care what I wore. He wouldn't sympathize when I told him about my troubles with Annie, the maid. He'd tell me simply to throw her out if I didn't like her. On the one or two occasions when I was really ill, he was worried and attentive until I recovered. But when I tried to get the same attention on the grounds of a miniature wound from the flatiron or a headache brought on by shopping for living-room drapes, he was impatient and increasingly inclined to be skeptical.

Incredibly early in our marriage we became brutally frank with each other. I said Mac was conceited, selfish, and that he neglected me. Mac would shout at me with the rage of sheer exhaustion. Would I keep quiet about that forgotten telephone call. Good God, he was up to his ears in trouble as it was!

He wasn't exaggerating. Poor Mac, confused, hindered, slandered in every move he made. I didn't know. He stopped trying to tell me things. It was my fault I couldn't help him when he needed help most. But I didn't know that, either.

I saw him turning away from me. I knew that, in some ways, he actually avoided me. The lights burned late in his office at City Hall on nights when he could have worked at home. When he did come home, he wasn't eager any more. Once when something provoked me into my usual bitter protest that he didn't love me, he snatched me roughly into his arms, stifled me into silence with a savage kiss.

"I wish I'd never met you," he said grimly.

MARJORY was Mac's secretary now. He was almost fiercely stubborn in his refusal to discharge her. His bitter comments when I demanded it roused a wild, jealous bitterness in me. He couldn't do without Marjory, he said. Even if he felt like betraying her loyalty to him by dismissing her, he needed her. He didn't say he needed her far more than he needed me, but I was beginning to see it, just the same.

The drudgery and late hours of campaigning over, Marjory didn't look dragged out and disheveled any more. She was doing her hair a new way. She took pains to dress well. She looked too happy, sitting there near Mac. She worked as late as he did. I'd come in and find him contentedly talking to her. Marjory listened, I suppose. She didn't make any demands. She knew when to send out for coffee, when to talk, and when to wait. She must have known how it was with Mac and me. She wouldn't have been human if she hadn't made the most of it.

I saw what was happening. Mac was avoiding me, and when he avoided me, he was with Marjory. He saw far more of her than he did of me. Marjory had the

whiphand again. She could monopolize Mac. Her clear, low voice could deal with my claims. "Mr. Laner is very busy right at the moment—"

I couldn't stand it. I began to fight—as you fight when you're insanely jealous, desperate. I did the very thing to make Mac aware of Marjory—if he hadn't been aware of her already. I battered him with accusations of things that might never have been in his mind. I told him Marjory had always been in love with him. I accused him of turning from me to her. He didn't even try to answer. He folded up the books he had been working on and left the house without a word.

EVERYTHING was wrong after that. Mac didn't try for a reconciliation. He came and went almost as if he didn't see me. I was frightened. I began to believe what I hadn't believed before—that what I had said about him and Marjory was actually true. There was no missing the fact that Mac was acting strangely. I didn't know when he slept. He was ignoring his meals. Sometimes he ignored me completely. Sometimes I found him looking at me as if he had never seen me before.

I realized Mac was in some municipal difficulty. But then, he was always in difficulty. I had no way of knowing that this was worse than those other worries of his. Ever since we'd married he'd been unable to go places with me, too busy to spend any time with me. He could be with Marjory, though—I noticed that! When I called his office in the evening, it was always Marjory's voice that answered. When he was working at home, I would hear him telephone her. He couldn't get through an evening without phoning Marjory.

I was insane with jealousy. I didn't know what I was doing. Neither did Mac. When he tried to take me into his arms one night, I slapped his face, drew away from him. I didn't mean to. Afterward, I asked myself what had made me do it. Mac looked at me for a moment. There was an expression in his eyes I didn't understand, a white line around his mouth.

"All right," he said hoarsely. "We're finished."

He didn't come back that time. I waited and waited. Then, I heard he was staying at a downtown hotel. It seemed to me that all my life, I'd been trying to see Mac and hadn't been able to do it. For eternities I'd been barred at office doors, dismissed by telephone.

I went home. Everyone knew Mac had left me. They condemned him. The family was a united force trying to stop me from trying to see Mac, trying to communicate with him. I said I hated him. I kept saying it. But I kept looking for him, waiting for him. I didn't know what I'd do if I saw him. I knew I'd still blame him. And yet my nights were agonized, sleepless. The mere mention of his name could make me lose control of myself.

"She's well rid of him," tactless Uncle Rolly informed us at the dinner table. "If I ever misjudged a man, I backed the wrong horse when I backed Mac Laner. I'd have sworn he could keep his head. But he's let them confuse him, and let his political enemies get him into trouble up to his neck. He's going to be lucky if he stays out of jail."

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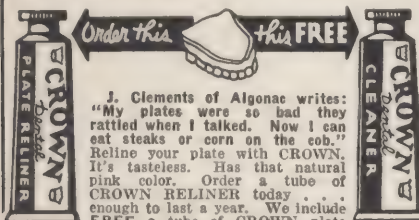
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papers. The political gossip of my uncles and my father. I suffocated with incredulous terror as the scandal mounted. You couldn't read a paper that didn't fling another stone at him. You couldn't listen to a group of men—

"I'm going back to him!" I sobbed. "I didn't know what trouble he was in! I didn't understand."

At first I didn't understand their protests. Surely Mother, who didn't believe in broken marriages, would urge me to try again. But she'd changed. She was like Uncle Rolly, like all the others now. They all said "no." I wouldn't listen. Finally Mother had to tell me.

"Nita, you'll have to know. You've been in no condition for a discussion of this kind. But if you insist upon this course, you must understand one thing. Uncle Rolly says Mac has become pretty well involved with that secretary of his—that Marjory Howorth. It's not just gossip, rumor. They've been thoroughly indiscreet."

She watched me. She must have felt reassured when I didn't cry out, didn't protest. But you don't often cry out when there's a knife turning in your heart. You can't. I went upstairs. I kept thinking about what she'd said. Mac—Marjory Howorth. I didn't think I could stand the pain of it. It was late evening then. When I was sure I wouldn't be interrupted, I picked up the extension telephone. Mac wasn't at the City Hall office. He wasn't at his hotel.

I can't explain what I did next. It's still part of a mad, terrible dream. I don't even remember thinking. I slipped out of the house. No one saw me or questioned me. Everything happened with the easy unreality of a dream. There was a taxi on our street. I summoned it, gave the address of Marjory Howorth's apartment which I'd copied from the telephone directory.

I walked upstairs, down a corridor. The number of Marjory's apartment seemed to rise out of the dimness of the corridor. Without thinking, I turned the knob of the door. It gave. I walked into the little reception hall—stood in the nearest doorway and saw my husband in Marjory's arms.

There was a mist before my eyes. I heard Mac's voice, hoarse, strange: "You little fool. If it's grounds for a divorce you want, you should have brought witnesses." The mist didn't quite clear. Mac's face swam before my eyes, also the soft green of Marjory's housecoat, the strange darkness of her eyes.

I heard my own voice, shrill, breaking. Even that was unreal. "I hate you! I want a divorce! I never want to see you again!"

I was outside, when I realized it fully. It was cold. A taxi was sliding along beside the curb. I thought, "I won't think about this until I can lean on something." I gave the number of my parents' house. I closed my eyes.

I was in bed at home when I opened them again. Everything was strange. Gradually I understood things. It was Friday now. Monday everything had happened. I had been ill. I had collapsed in a cab downtown.

Mother didn't talk about it. She tried to put me off. But Aunt Janet told me. I'd had a temperature. I'd rambled. They'd been able to understand where I'd been, what I'd seen.

"Don't!" The memories crashed down upon me like toppling bricks.

"We knew you didn't really want to see him," Aunt Janet said. "You were delirious. When he came, we sent him away."

I felt a tightening in my chest, like suffocation. I didn't say anything. I was beyond even tears.

That night when they said I was worse again, Mother said to me, "Anita, do you want us to send for Mac?"

I said "no." But if he had come back, I'd have seen him. I waited, waited. Every time a bell rang, I listened. Every time my door opened, I started. But I wouldn't send for him. I wouldn't cry out for a man who didn't love me, had never loved me. They kept reminding me of little things he'd done to prove he'd never loved me. They infuriated me by reminding me that I was young, I had my whole life before me. After what I'd seen with my own eyes, how could I lie there and brood about a man who had never deserved me? Sometimes I asked myself that. Most of the time I didn't care. Life was a string of meaningless days and hours and minutes.

IT might have gone on that way for indefinite days and hours and minutes if Marjory hadn't come that day. Aunt Janet didn't want to let her in. I heard them quarreling in the hall downstairs, heard Aunt Janet's outraged, high-pitched voice. But Marjorie must have run past her. She came into my room, breathless. She had a paper in her hand.

"They'll probably throw me out of here," she said directly, "so I won't waste time. I've come to give you a chance to straighten things out with Mac."

"No—don't say anything. You're lucky to get it. You know what your loving family doesn't know. Mac didn't turn to me until you pushed him away. You know it's true!" Her eyes blazed at me. "I could have told you what was wrong with your marriage long ago. You wanted Mac to love you, but you didn't want to do your share. You wanted all the attention and devotion in the world, didn't you? Did you ever give any? Did you ever try to encourage him, listen to him, make him feel sure of himself when he was afraid he was licked? You did not!"

I could only stare at her.

"You've been pretty sick, I know that." She sat down. "You've made Mac sicker, worrying about you. If I didn't think you loved him, I wouldn't tell you all this. I wouldn't give you a chance. I wouldn't give you a chance anyway—I'll be honest—if I didn't know that Mac loves you so much there'll never be any hope for me. I've tried. I'm not ashamed or sorry for anything I've done. But none of it was any use. He didn't really want me—ever. It was just that he was down and out and discouraged. There wasn't anything left, anyway. I wouldn't believe it, at first. But when you came that night, when you found us and went away—when I saw how much he cared—I knew."

She unfolded the paper she had bought—newspaper, blank on one side. I saw the wet, black type of the proof in her hand—a press proof of a front page not yet released.

"That's it," she said levelly. "Mac's resignation from office—under fire. There's

still time to stop the story. Maybe even you can't make Mac change his mind now. I came here to you, hoping there was just a chance. Mac isn't yellow. He was never a quitter before. Perhaps if you could change the picture again—oh, I don't believe in miracles. But if you're human, if you love him enough to have made all this misery, can't you try?"

Tell him to come back!" I whispered. "Tell him I've wanted him."

"You tell him yourself," she said. "I'm not in this any more. I'm going away. But if you can't go back and make a happy marriage out of what could be heaven on earth, I'll never bother to do a decent thing again—not as long as I live."

She went away. And it was months before I could fully understand that she had taken out of that room with her a spoiled child who would never come back again.

I didn't say anything about forgiving Mac when he drew me close that night in our own home. It was a woman, a wife, who drew his head down upon her shoulder, crumpled up the newssheet with the resignation story we had killed that day. Thank God I'd been able to make Mac listen to me.

"If you could get that office away from Toller," I'd told him, "you can fight to keep it! We'll find a way—together."

We Played With Emotions

(Continued from page 15)

not since my hospital days when he was there under treatment for high blood pressure. A few days following his discharge, I had left St. Andrew's to become a registered nurse with one of the big public service corporations.

Purposely I hadn't told him of this change. He had been definitely interested in me—far too interested, considering that he was a married man. Naturally, I had met his wife.

Not knowing where I was, he had addressed me in care of the State Nurses' Association, to which I belonged, and they had forwarded the letter, which had reached me Saturday morning. And now I read it again. He had addressed me, "Dear Ginger," for that was what the girls in the hospital called me.

If you get this letter in time, and I trust you will, won't you please give me a ring at the club? I'll wait all day Sunday in the hope that you will phone. But if this letter is delayed in reaching you, you can always leave a message at the club or write me there. My wife and I are separated and I've been spending much of my time in New York.

With many precious memories, and hoping that you are happy and still free to see me, I am,

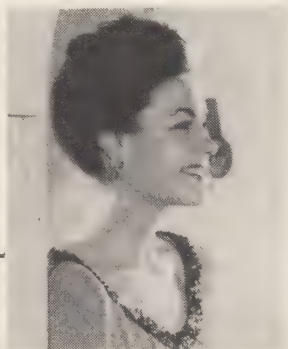
As ever,

PHIL HADLEY

And we have. The near disgrace of a "schoolboy" mayor is now almost four years behind us. Mac is still mayor and looking to a higher political office. He talks taxes and municipal debts all the time. I don't mind any more. I know a lot about taxes and municipal debts. I'm interested. My husband's career is as much our life together, our future, as is our home. I've kept coffee hot on election nights and sent clean shirts to him at campaign headquarters. I've watched him go out when I've wanted him to stay at home. I've laughed when he's forgotten to telephone.

And the happiness I've found has been almost worth the price I paid for it. For I've learned two strange and miraculous things about marriage. I make no demands upon my husband, and he is more mine than he ever was. I make him the center of my life and, without trying for it, I am what I want more than anything on earth to be—more important than anyone else to him.

"Nita," he says, "light yourself a cigarette. I'm going to bend your ears with the whole aldermanic session." I listen, and wonder that once I wouldn't let him talk to me. Often I marvel that life, with such a reputation for revenge, can be kind enough sometimes to give back to you what you've once tried to throw away.



I glanced at the letterhead, which was engraved with the name of an architects' club and hurried to the phone booths in the lobby.

Why hadn't I thought of this before? The club address was only a few blocks away. We could be in the dining room before Dick and his party left. This was my chance, heaven sent, it seemed, to show Dick that I didn't sit home and mope while he enjoyed himself away from me. I remembered Mr. Hadley as in his early forties, handsome, impressive looking and the typical rich man-of-the-world in manner and clothes. If he didn't arouse Dick's jealousy, it meant that the man I loved had stopped caring and was trying to let me down by degrees.

I had only the slightest qualms in making the call. Since he was separated from his wife, what harm would I be doing her? Nor was I alarmed at the warm tone of his letter. At the hospital, interns had all gone for my red hair and big brown eyes, and there had been romantic kids before them and desirous men afterward. But when my interest waned and I discovered it wasn't really love that I felt, all these men and boys without exception found another girl to take my place in their lives. Why should anything serious result from this one date with Philip Hadley?

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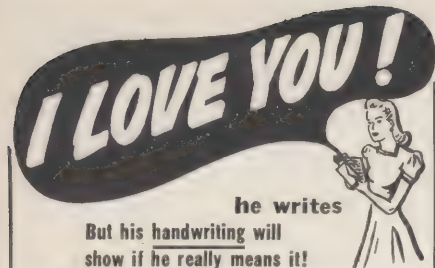
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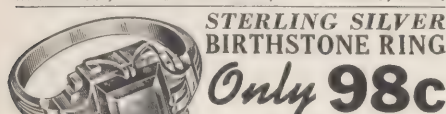


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When I got him on the phone, and he said he'd be delighted to take me to breakfast at the hotel, his smooth, gentlemanly voice was further reassurance that nothing unpleasant would come of the new tactics I was trying on Dick, my only fear being that they wouldn't work.

Less than ten minutes later, we were being ushered to a table by the respectful headwaiter. Hadley was the type of man who got the best of service without having to demand it.

We passed Dick and his group, and it was impossible for him not to see us. But I gave no sign of being aware that he was within miles of me. But I was highly nervous, wondering if I'd done the wise thing, after all, and realizing how often plans like mine explode in a girl's face. It might turn out that this would give Dick the excuse he was looking for to break with me completely.

I crumbled the hard rolls and hardly tasted the kidneys *en brochette*, for which the hotel was famous, although I ate them. All my thoughts were with Dick.

When I could no longer control the terrible hunger to look at him, I turned around, pretending to adjust the red fox scarf I had flung over the back of the chair.

Dick was helping one of the girls on with her coat. They were preparing to leave.

Meanwhile, I had been talking brightly enough with Philip Hadley—more vivaciously than usual, I guess, because I was tense inside. I answered his questions about my present job and we did some reminiscing about the hospital. He never mentioned his wife, and I didn't, of course. Casually he mentioned a recent plan for moving his office from Westchester, near his home, to New York City.

WHEN Dick had left and I could concentrate more upon the man I was with, I noticed a certain constraint in his manner quite different from his unconcealed admiration for me at the hospital when I'd had to be constantly on guard against his love-making, and the tone of the letter with its mention of "precious memories" and the intimate closing words.

I thought, "He must have built up some romantic ideal of me, and now I've disappointed him."

But I didn't care. I was so wrapped up in Dick that even my woman's vanity didn't function with any other man.

When our meal was over and we were in the street, he said, still casually, "It's a grand day. If I get my car, would you like to take a little ride in the country? We could stop at Arrowhead Inn and dance."

I thanked him and refused, saying that I had an engagement for early that evening. I hadn't, but I was crazy to get back to the apartment to see if Dick would phone later to check up on my whereabouts.

Phil didn't seem particularly disappointed, and called a taxicab to take me home. He got in the cab with me, saying that he had time to kill. However, before we reached my apartment house, I had made an engagement with him to go to a hit musical show the following Wednesday night.

"Just one last date," I told myself. It would give added credence to the impression I wanted to make on Dick that there were other men and other things in my life besides him. I wasn't a good bluffer or fibber.

I spent a miserable Sunday afternoon alone, waiting for the phone to ring, and haunted by what Dick had done to me and the memory of how he had looked in the restaurant, dominating the party as usual with his personal charm.

It was almost ten and I was taking a bath, when the phone rang.

Wrapping myself in a huge towel, I rushed out to answer.

Dick's light voice, at its most affable, said, "How about a snack and a drink, Virginia, before you turn in?"

My heart was spilling out its joy and relief, but I determined not to show it—not yet.

"Well, look who's here!" I exclaimed. "I certainly didn't expect to hear from you tonight."

Undoubtedly suspecting I'd seen him, he said, "I got to town this morning. But I was all tied up with some people I met out there."

I was panting to see him that night, but somehow I carried through. "I'm simply exhausted, Dick," I told him. "I did about a million things today and was just going to hop into bed. The snack would be nice, but sleep is going to be nicer. I'm sorry."

A silence hung between us, sharp with the surprise I knew he must be feeling, and his curiosity about Philip Hadley—or maybe, I hoped, jealousy about him. When Dick spoke again, trying to be cool, I wasn't deceived.

"Dinner tomorrow?"

I made the date with him and went to bed, radiantly happy. He had said, "Good night, darling. I've missed you a lot."

At six the following evening, we met at our favorite downtown restaurant. As usual, we had a cocktail at the bar before sitting down. Dick lost no time in setting things straight between us. For all his personal, all too human temperament, he had one of those scientific minds, a brilliant head for facts and figures. He did statistical work and financial analyses for a Wall Street paper.

"Didn't you see me at the hotel on Sunday?" he asked.

I sipped my cocktail to conceal what might show in my face. "Why, no! When did you get back, anyway?"

He smiled suddenly, the utterly charming, boyish smile that was the real secret of his charm, the smile which could always twist my heart into an agony of love for him, whether I was feeling happy or angry at him, sure of myself as I was now, or doubtful.

"Of course, I'll never know whether you saw me or not," he was saying. And then the smile faded. "But I was there and I saw you and the man you were with."

"He was a patient of mine at the hospital—" I began.

But Dick interrupted, picking up his cocktail, "I wanted to explain why I was there. You see, it was a pretty dull party out there, and I thought of an excuse to drive back to town on Sunday morning. And then as I was getting out of the car, I happened to meet a girl I knew at college. We thought it would be fun to gather some of the others who were here in New York and we started to look up phone numbers. Of course, you wouldn't have known any of them and I didn't think there'd be much point in asking you to join us. You'd have been bored."

I let him finish the long, carefully worded speech, and then I asked him, "Why should you have included me, Dick?" There was an uncontrollable catch in my voice which I hoped he hadn't noticed. And then I went on desperately with what I knew I had to say. "We gave each other an awful rush at first. But we've both got old friends. And we both should make new ones. Otherwise we'll end up by boring each other."

"You may be right," he admitted, as if the whole idea had been mine, and the change in our first romantic enthusiasm had come about through me. But he knew perfectly well how crazy I was about him.

And so, by not making up his mind to what extent he loved me, Dick forced me to continue with the new game I was trying to play. But it was hard to make an impression on him or to guess what he really felt. He was a lot smarter than I and not easy to fool.

During dinner, he asked no questions about Philip and interrupted me whenever I tried to bring him into the conversation. We went to a movie on Broadway, and this gave me a chance to mention the show I expected to see on Wednesday, when we passed the lighted theater. Dick didn't seem to hear what I said.

We went to the early performance of the movie and were out around ten. Although I had decided not to do it, I heard myself asking Dick if he'd like some coffee at my apartment.

And later it was the same old story. I let him make love to me as much as I dared, powerless to resist the ecstasy that thrilled me at his slightest touch. Dick's kisses were all I needed to sweep me to the final heights of supreme fulfillment.

And I could feel safe with him. He didn't want to owe me marriage any more than he wanted to owe his tailor for a suit of clothes.

For my weakness, if it was weakness, I was punished before he left me that night. At the door, he said, "By the way, dearest, I meant to tell you that we've gotten together—four of the people I met Sunday—to play bridge tomorrow night. I don't suppose you'd care to kibitz?"

I shook my head as he'd expected me to, knowing I didn't like cards.

"You have a date on Wednesday evening, did you say?" he went on.

I knew he was skeptical that I'd keep the date with Philip Hadley if he himself wanted to be with me. But I said, "Yes, I have. Call me later, Dick."

"All right. We'll cook up something for Saturday or Sunday," he replied.

And I couldn't bring myself to say then and there that I was going out of town for the week end, although I'd planned to tell him that.

ALONE, I found myself exactly where I had been before with Dick—already counting the days when he'd phone me and wondering miserably if it were really a bridge gathering or if he had made a date with the girl he had met in the street, or one of the others.

On Wednesday I was all ready when Philip Hadley arrived at eight. And when I saw his evening clothes, and the corsage of orchids he brought me, I was glad I'd put on my long dinner dress and wedge sandals.

He glanced interestedly around the apart-

ment, noticing its modest but cheerful and attractive modernness, saying, "You've quite a snug little nest here, young lady. May I drop in sometime—just for a chat?"

"Poor dear," I thought, "he's at loose ends without his wife and home." And wondering what had come between them, I said "I'd love to have you sometime."

"It's a promise?" he asked, dark eyes searching mine.

"Why, yes!" I replied. What else could I say, without making a silly fuss? But I realized my mistake in thinking him disillusioned when he met me again.

DURING the show and our later visit to a café, I felt a gathering sense of pressure. I tried to relax and enjoy myself, thinking that I need never see him again, but his closeness and the intense, eager way he looked at me made me feel as if I were his prisoner. Phil Hadley was a gentleman and said or did nothing to embarrass me. Just the same, I was conscious of his admiration every minute of the time.

As we got into a cab at last, he said, "Well, I feel like another man after seeing you again, Ginger!"

I hated that name and no one called me by it any more. But I concealed my annoyance. After all, he had been very nice. If only I could get home without his trying to kiss me!

"I haven't been really happy since you nursed me at the hospital," he went on. But he was smiling almost playfully and I felt more at ease. "Won't you take pity on a lonely man and drive out to the country on Saturday with me?"

Sincerely I said, "I don't like the idea, Mr. Hadley—going out with a married man, I mean. It's been lovely tonight, but I'd better not see you again."

His hands were clenched on his knees, and I noticed a strained expression around his finely chiseled mouth. "But my wife is getting her divorce now," he said very quietly. "She's in Reno. Would you like me to show you—" He began to feel in the pocket of his overcoat.

I stopped him, not wanting to see her letter or whatever else he had in mind. "No, no! Of course I don't doubt your word." I hesitated, and then added, "I'm sorry you couldn't make a go of it." I remembered his wife vividly, a cool, reserved woman of about thirty with an untouchable look about her. Not appealing, and yet I knew she'd make an appropriate wife for a man of his type.

"We were never really congenial," he said briefly. And then, voice changing, he asked me again about Saturday.

By this time we were at the apartment house, and it was partly to prevent any further discussion that I said hastily, "Please don't bother to come in. Yes, I can make it Saturday."

"Sure you'll be all right?" He got out of the cab to wait until I went into the house.



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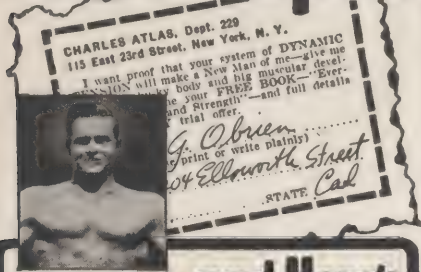
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Away from him, free, I was half convinced that my constant brooding of late concerning Dick was turning me into a nervous alarmist. What had I to fear from Philip Hadley? And I wasn't a child. If he did try to kiss me, what harm could result from that? Looking back, I know it must have been my instinct warning me.

I was very glad I'd made the date when Dick phoned to say that he was playing golf on Sunday with a friend from the office. "What would you like to do on Saturday?" he asked, as if it could be taken for granted that I'd kept both days open for him.

In bitter triumph, I was able to tell him truthfully that I had a date for Saturday. At last Dick showed some reaction. "I'll make a reservation a couple of weeks in advance," he snapped sarcastically, "before I count on you again."

His words turned me cold with dread. Had I gone too far, I brooded? Did Dick really mean that he'd wait two weeks between asking me out and the date itself? Or was he getting jealous at last?

But I wasn't long in doubt. The next word I got from Dick came in the form of a letter. It was written and spaced formally, like an invitation, and requested the pleasure of my company at the movies—exactly two weeks later!

He could make outside dates when he felt like it, but he was punishing me for doing likewise. I ignored the letter. If he didn't telephone me, I'd have to take it as proof that Dick never would be serious with me.

IN THIS mood of despair and desperation, I began to go out with Philip Hadley, haunted by thoughts of Dick no matter where we were or what we were doing. Phil was wonderful to me, asked nothing but my companionship. I still had that peculiar sense of being his captive. But it no longer irked me. When almost a month went by and I still hadn't heard from Dick, another man's companionship soothed my torn pride and filled time which I would have spent in grief.

On Thanksgiving Day, the loneliest day except Christmas that a girl away from her family is confronted with, he took me to a football game. But first we stopped at his office, which I'd never seen. Phil said that he had left the tickets in his desk and asked me to come up with him to get them.

The offices were on the top floor of a narrow, seven-story building in the Grand Central district. He had the entire floor, and I was impressed with the paneled walls and smart decorations. While he fumbled in the top drawer of the enormous modernistic desk, I stood in the doorway of his office and admired it.

"It must be a pleasure to work in a place like this," I exclaimed. "And your work is so interesting."

He looked up at me, the tickets in his hand. "You are too young to understand, Virginia," he said abruptly, "and I hope you never will. But when success is achieved, it has a way of turning into dull responsibility. Once I thought my work could fill my life: But not any more." And then, before I could speak, he laughed. "I decorated this office to match your coloring."

"No!" I exclaimed, not believing him.

"Come here," he said, in the same light way.

He pointed to his desk and I came forward to look at what he wanted to show me. Standing beside the telephone was a beautifully framed photograph of myself. I was in my nurse's uniform, standing at a table, profile to the camera, arranging flowers in a vase.

So surprised I couldn't speak, I heard him go on, "I snapped that picture at the hospital, Virginia, and had it enlarged. I was in love, the first minute I saw you. And I'm still in love—terribly."

His arm slipped around me and I went rigid, breathless.

"You are the only beautiful thing in my life." But he didn't try to hold me closer or kiss me, seeming to know what a surprise this was to me. "I always knew I'd find you again, darling. I'll teach you to love me, and I know—just as surely as I knew we'd meet again—that someday you'll be my wife."

I drew away from him. "Don't—please don't!" I cried.

As if I hadn't rebuffed him, he said gaily, "Well, let's go! We don't want to miss the kick-off."

On the drive up, during the game, and driving back to New York, it seemed impossible that the scene between us at the office had happened.

His mood of almost boyish gaiety held. He seemed younger than Dick. But I was depressed. "I've got to tell him," I kept thinking, "that I never can love him." And at last, when we were in the city, having stopped for dinner on the way, I gathered my courage.

"Phil, I mustn't see you again," I faltered. "I'm very much in love with someone else. We've quarreled, but—well, no matter. I like you an awful lot, but it can't ever be love. I'm sorry if you thought—"

"Cheer up, you funny little thing!" he interrupted my miserable apologies. "I'll tell you what we'll do. Let's take a little vacation from each other—a month, say. That will give you time to really understand how you feel. I'm willing to take the chance."

It flashed through my mind, "A vacation from two men!" But I still hoped that Dick would come back—and I was convinced that this would be my final date with Philip Hadley.

And then he was asking humbly, almost timidly, "Can't we go to your place, Virginia, for a little while? I want to remember you there. And you know you can trust me. It's only a little after nine and all I want to do is to sit quietly and look at you for a while."

I had accepted so much from him that I hadn't the face to refuse such a simple request for my own hospitality. And it would be our last date, really our last this time, and a chance to let him down gracefully and pleasantly. Besides, I had promised him before.

And so we drove to my apartment. I made coffee and set out some cookies I had on hand. As I set out my best coffee cups on the cocktail table, he watched me with an amused little smile as if I were a child playing house. Suddenly he said, "By the way, I think I have a bottle of French liqueur in my pocket. It would be swell with our coffee. Wait, I'll see."

His coat was in the foyer closet, and in a few minutes he came back with a fancy bottle of thick violet liquid which he poured into the two eye cups which I had put on the table as a joke, not having liqueur glasses.

"Well, here's looking at you!" he laughed, lifting the little cup. "Will you pour out some of the coffee, Virginia? We'll try the next one in the coffee the way the French do."

WHEN I came back from the kitchenette, his liqueur was gone and I sipped mine until I'd finished it.

Looking back later, I realized that I never really saw him drink the drugged liqueur. Its stimulating effects took hold of me too quickly. I was lost before I guessed the danger creeping closer and closer to me, blurring my mental faculties and boiling in my blood like fire.

Only later, when I felt the physical reaction, did I even suspect the truth. At the time, it seemed as if it made no difference what I did, what became of me. Dick had left me and what did I have to look forward to? Then I was crying in Philip Hadley's arms and he was kissing me with all his pent-up passion and mad, ruthless desire.

Long, long afterward, I was dreadfully sick. I stood clinging to the bathroom window ledge as the walls spun around me. The sickly light of the November dawn was stealing in before I felt strong enough to go out and face him.

He tried to kiss me again, but I fought him off. And then he was telling me, "I won't say I'm sorry. You are mine. That was what I had to be sure of. And now you'll marry me, Virginia, when I'm free."

"You put something in that stuff!" I accused him hoarsely. "And now you'd better go. Do you want to ruin my reputation, too?"

He was willing enough to go, sure that when the shock wore off I would want him again. I went to the door with him to be sure he'd leave the building. Shivering in my bathrobe and slippers, I stood at the top of the stairs.

"What will I do?" I thought wildly. "Oh, how can I live?"

But the horror of that night wasn't over. As I turned around to go back into the apartment, I heard footsteps on the stair above. It was his wife, white and exhausted looking from hours of waiting and watching on the stairs. And as she came down, looking at me with the staring eyes of a woman who has seen her last illusion die, I noticed her changed figure. Her black coat hung open and I knew she was carrying a child.

"I want to talk to you," she said bitterly. I gasped, "He said you were in Reno. He said—"

While I was still explaining, she cried out in her own mental agony, "I tried to hold him by having this baby! But whatever you did to him at the hospital—however you got around him—well, he asked me for a divorce even after I told him we were going to have it. And now I'll give it to him. I'll have his child in Florida and I'll have my freedom."

I began to beg and implore her to listen to me, telling her I didn't want her husband, but she stopped me with a stony smile.

"Don't worry! I won't name you in my suit. And do you know why? Because I

don't want him to feel he has to marry you. He'll never marry you, do you understand? When he has his freedom—and his child—he'll want me back again. So feel sorry for yourself, not me."

And then I was alone. The proud woman I had unknowingly wronged, carrying the other life that was in her, walked out of the apartment with her pale, fair head still high.

Right away, for fear I'd collapse, I got out my portable typewriter and wrote a letter to Philip Hadley. I wasted no words on what he had done to me. It was done and I'd have to live it down the best way I could. But I told him in the strongest words I knew that his wife, in her advanced condition of pregnancy, had waited and watched all night on the stairs outside my apartment, had followed us there and had seen him go away in the morning. And I ended, "I told you last night that I never wanted to see you again or hear from you. And I tell you so again. For your own self-respect, you won't let your wife divorce you now. An animal would have more conscience than that. I can even forgive you, if that means anything, if you'll stand by her and by the innocent, helpless child you are going to have."

Somehow I got dressed and went out to post the letter. And then, realizing suddenly that this was a working day and I must work to go on living—yes, I must go on living—I dragged myself to the office.

I don't know how I got through that day! That afternoon as I stepped out into the street, Dick's tall, slim figure emerged from the twilight and I heard his voice, unbelievably at first—until he caught my arm and I knew he was real.

"Virginia! Darling! I've been a fool! Can I come back? I need you so."

"Why were you so mean?" I whispered, trembling against him as we walked down the street, together at last. But he'd never know, I thought, how he had harmed me by his childish conceit and his treating my love as cheap. I had taught him a lesson, but at what a price!

In our old restaurant, he made me say I loved him. "I wanted you to call me," he confessed. "I was beastly jealous of that bird I saw you with, but at first I wouldn't admit it to myself. So I waited—and wasted our happiness. Oh, Virginia, tell me that you care the way you used to!"

I told him, and it was the truth. But our love was torment to me now.

And then he spoke of marriage. And again I said "yes." But it all seemed far away, unattainable almost. The joy I should have felt was spoiled, as I was spoiled. If only I could have told him, told someone! But I must force myself to forget. Telling would only start trouble. Now that the wrong had been committed, only one outcome could relieve my mind, a reconciliation between Mrs. Hadley and her husband.

THE next day, when I received a letter from him, this hope seemed doomed.

"She tricked me into having a child," I read with cold horror. "Yes, I lied to you about Reno. But I knew she'd give me the divorce, sooner or later. She started for Florida this morning. And I'll marry you, no matter what she thinks. We are made for each other, you and I. It's only your sweetness and pity that blinds you. I'll never give you up."

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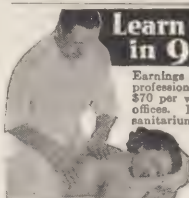


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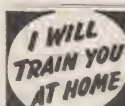
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Again I wrote him, denying that I loved him, or that my feelings about his wife had anything to do with the abhorrence I felt toward him for what he had done to me. Nor did I mention Dick. I wanted to keep him out of it.

But at last I had to tell him something of Philip Hadley because the second letter didn't do me any good. He began to phone me, often when Dick was at the apartment.

"Don't answer," Dick said, "and he'll soon get tired!" And when I had to have my telephone taken out, he accused me of dramatizing the whole thing. With his mind all geared to facts and figures, and rightly convinced of my sincerity in the dislike I expressed, Dick couldn't imagine that any intelligent man of Philip Hadley's standing would keep up such a pursuit very long. He didn't know about the twisted emotions let loose upon me, nor of the reckless passion in Phil's letters and in his voice when he spoke to me on the phone.

And something worse was beginning to happen. With the telephone out, and after I had instructed them at the office that I wouldn't take any personal calls, Phil began to follow me.

I got more and more terrified—not only for myself, but for fear he might shoot Dick. I had read so many newspaper accounts about jilted men who had done that, usually killing the girl, but sometimes the rival man. And Phil Hadley considered himself jilted.

A month passed and I still had the feeling he was following me. Then I saw him one morning on the other side of the street when I left my apartment house by the back way. My nerves couldn't take any more. That evening I asked Dick what I ought to do to protect myself—asked him if the police could stop it.

But he was angered that I could think of such a thing. "Do you want publicity?" he asked. "Is that the idea?" And then, when I was thinking that I couldn't risk a complaint which might make matters worse, he added, "Would you feel easier if we got married right away, Virginia?"

The way Dick asked it made me realize he suspected I might be attempting to hasten our spring wedding by pretending to be upset about Phil.

Hot with resentment, I cried, "I'll never marry you, Dick, until that man stops bothering me!" And I meant it. I couldn't drag him into the shadows that were gathering around my life.

But I wanted to clear myself of Dick's unjust suspicion, and I thought, "I'll show him the next letter, no matter what Phil says in it. That will be proof."

I had been tearing up, unread, the letters that came almost every day. But the next one I opened. It was quieter in tone than the others. This was what he wrote, and I showed it to Dick on the afternoon of the Saturday morning I received it:

DEAR VIRGINIA:

All I am pleading for is to see you once again. If you will tell me face to face that you don't want to see me again, I'll respect your wishes. But I do think you owe me this slight consideration. Today (Saturday) I'll be at the office until three o'clock. Will you please stop in and see me for just a few minutes, any time before then? We won't be alone. I'll expect you unless you phone to the contrary.

PHIL

When he'd glanced over the letter, Dick asked, "Well, did you phone him?"

"Of course not," I told him. "Anyway, he won't be following us this afternoon. That will be a relief."

To my surprise, he frowned. "What harm will it do you to see the poor guy?" he demanded. "You've been ducking him, the way a lot of girls do when they break with men, dramatizing everything and trying to keep a man dangling and hoping. Want to make a bet with me?"

"What bet?" I asked unsteadily, hurt by the faint look of scorn on his face.

"I'll bet you an extra karat in your engagement ring that if you'll talk to him calmly for five minutes and tell him right to his face that you are going to be married, you'll never hear from him or see him again."

"I don't want to bet about a thing like that," I said.

"So you never let him know about our engagement?" Dick's voice cut me.

"You're so wise!" I cried. "Tell me what to do and I'll do it—anything to end this awful strain of having him think about me all the time, follow me—"

Dick handed me back the letter. "It's simple, if you really want to end it. We'll go over to his office now. I'll wait downstairs while you go up and see him."

It was a challenge to me and I took it. And by now I was furious with a new kind of anger at Philip Hadley. Not content with what he had already done, he dared to torment me in another way.

I didn't speak to Dick as we walked across to the office. At the elevator, he lighted a cigarette. "Can I trust you to go in?" he asked.

The elevator door swung open and I stepped into it without a word or a backward look. I knew now that he really doubted me, considered most of my story made-up nonsense to intrigue his interest. And I also knew that something dreadful would happen as a result of this visit to Philip Hadley's office. Yet I pushed open the door and went in, forced by Dick's lack of understanding and his disbelief in me.

TWO men were working in the drafting room next to his private office. His door was open, but he didn't hear me cross the heavily carpeted reception room. Unmoving, he sat at the desk, staring ahead of him—maybe at my picture.

"Here I am," I said.

In one movement, he shot up from the chair and closed the door behind me. "You've come!" he whispered huskily.

I backed away from him and caught the handle of the door, ready to scream for help if he touched me. "I'm going to be married soon," I said, staring at the design in his bow tie. "I despise you. What you did to me was horrible."

My hand turned on the doorknob and he stood frozen where he was. And then I heard his voice, intoning slowly like a cracked bell, "Look at me, Virginia."

I looked at a white, haggard face. Only the dark eyes seemed alive, and in them I saw a message for me. I couldn't understand, but it was horrible. And then I turned and flung open the door, stumbled out of his office and across the reception room, knocking into furniture in my blind, terrified flight. But he wasn't following me

—not then.

Safely in the elevator, I pulled myself together. Dick was waiting, still puffing at his cigarette.

"Well, is the drama finally over?" he asked jauntily.

I couldn't speak yet. The strain of going there and facing Phil Hadley, and that instant of strange, crawling horror when he looked into my eyes, was still upon me.

"If he continues to bother you," Dick went on, urging me toward the street, "it'll just prove you didn't see him today."

I stood still and faced him. "I did see him," I said slowly, hardly recognizing my own voice. "And he's planning something now—something dreadful. It was in his eyes."

"Listen here!" Dick snapped. "If you're going to be jittery today—imagining things and pulling this line of being pursued, or whatever it is—"

And then, my writhing, tormented soul rising in rebellion, I cried, "He drugged me and he took advantage of me, and you were to blame! You played with me, Dick. You took advantage of me, too—took your time to make up your mind until I was almost crazy and started to go out with him! And then you laughed at me—taunted me into going up to look at him again, to be in the same room with him again—because you didn't understand, and you'll never understand, what it is to have faith. You even had to prove love to yourself!"

I was pulling away from him, and he hurried after me into the street.

"Let me alone!" People were looking at us, but it didn't matter. "I've been almost crazy," I raved, "and all you did was to sneer!"

His voice was as cold and cutting as the wind that hit my face. "You're making a scene. But don't try to fool me, Virginia. Now I know the truth. He wouldn't marry you. So you're talking about being drugged. Trying to—"

But he never finished that sentence. Someone screamed and a man close to me shouted, "Look out!"

People in the street around us began to scatter and scream. And then I saw it—a man's body crashing at the sidewalk only a few yards from where Dick and I were standing. But I didn't run away in horror, as did the others. My nurse's training sent

me forward instinctively before I even thought of whom the man might be.

Phil Hadley's face, unmarred, was turned sightlessly up at me as his life's blood drained slowly away from him. I knelt down beside him on the pavement and knew at last what those staring eyes had told me when they were alive. It was a crazed good-by.

And then I saw my photograph clutched in one of his outflung hands. It was stained with blood from his dead, broken body. For the sake of his wife, I snatched it from between the lax fingers and slipped it into my bag.

All this happened in a few seconds. When a policeman pushed through the crowd that was venturing closer now in morbid curiosity, Dick was hurrying me away.

"How could you even look at him?" he asked, white and shaken from the little he had seen, not knowing who the man on the pavement was. "What were you touching him for?"

Numb and indifferent, I said calmly, "To get my photograph. He had it in his hand."

"I need a drink," Dick guided me into a smart cocktail lounge we were passing, a mockery of death in its gay decoration and bright leather chairs. His hand was shaking as he pulled one out for me. "It was—it was that Hadley man?" he faltered.

I nodded. "He wanted to marry me," I said, "and I told him about you."

"I'm a fool," Dick muttered. And then he begged me, "Talk, Virginia! Don't look at me like that. I'll understand you from now on, I'll believe you."

But I couldn't talk. I was thinking of the child who never would have a father and of the woman who still hoped to get him back.

Dick and I are married now. He believes at last in my love, and in his own love for me. But there is a secret between us. I am keeping my photograph in a carefully hidden place. The stain on it is a symbol of my own guilt. I had three "last dates" with a married man and the one that was really the last was a date with death. I can't blame Dick—I know this now—nor can I put all the blame on the man who is dead. I never should have made the first date with him. And I want other girls to know my secret, girls who go out with married men. I can never be entirely happy again nor fully at peace with myself.

Cooking Secrets

(Continued from page 28)

bread cubes to each portion, topped with parsley. Two tablespoons of liquid garlic can substitute for the buds, if you'll feel better about it.

From the Far East, an East Indian Bisque, made subtly flavorful with apple, onion and curry. Combine a cup each of coarsely chopped apple and onion with 1½ cups of water, and when tender, add a can of chicken consommé. Bring to a boil, cook ten minutes, add the hot mixture slowly to ½ cup of heavy cream, then season with salt and a little curry. Heat and cook a minute longer.

From Denmark, a Sherry Chestnut Soup. Roast 1½ pounds of chestnuts in a slow oven for 50 to 60 minutes. Peel, put through

a grinder, then add to 2 quarts of chicken or beef stock. Simmer for 45 minutes, add a tablespoon of flour creamed with a tablespoon of butter, salt and pepper to taste, and lastly add 2 tablespoons of sherry. If you like a dark soup, color it a bit.

WHOLE-MEAL SOUPS

These need only a salad, a beverage and dessert to complete a perfect meal. Try these:

Succotash Chowder: Add a can of succotash to two cans of Mushroom Soup, mince one onion into it and at the last moment add chopped broiled bacon. Very filling, especially with Sour Cream Corn Sticks.

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Dutch Split-Pea Soup, pepped up with a hint of ginger: Soak a pound of split peas over night, drain, simmer in enough water to cover for 2 hours, or until tender. Drain and put through a sieve. Boil a pig's knuckle until tender, add the pea purée, 3 chopped leeks, 2 chopped onions, ½ cup chopped celery, salt, pepper and a little nutmeg. Simmer 30 minutes, then serve with sautéed onions and croutons.

Swedish Cold Buttermilk Soup: Combine a cup of chopped canned shrimps, ½ a cucumber diced, a tablespoon of minced chives, a tablespoon of prepared mustard, and a teaspoon each of salt and sugar. Stir in a quart of buttermilk and chill thoroughly.

Cream Of Watercress And Potato Soup: It's deceptively ethereal to look at, but very substantial, especially with Smithfield Ham Biscuits. Wash a bunch of watercress. Add it to an onion which is browning slightly in butter. Then add 3 medium quartered potatoes, 3 cups of water, and simmer until the potatoes are tender. Add salt, pepper and a pinch of thyme. Press through a sieve, add a cup of milk or cream, heat and serve.

SOUP QUICKIES

These soups are life savers for the career woman, for the housewife who's been doing extra jobs all afternoon, or the hostess who has to fill out a slim meal for unexpected guests.

Vitamin Consommé: Heat 2 cans of consommé with 1 can of V8 Vegetable Juice and add a dash or two of sherry.

Pepper Pot Supper Soup: Combine a can of condensed pepper pot soup with 1 can condensed tomato soup, blend in 2 soup-cans of milk and heat and serve.

Tomato consommé: Open cans of plain tomato juice, and simmer with a minced onion, sugar, salt and pepper to taste and a dash of Worcestershire Sauce. Serve hot.

Soup Provencale: Blend 1 can of condensed celery soup and 1 can of condensed chicken soup. Fill 1 can half full of milk, half full of water, add, heat and serve. For extra flavor, sprinkle with toasted almond strips.

Just a word on the proper accompaniments to soup. You can float Popcorn, Rice Crispies, Toasted Slivered Almonds or Croutons in the soup. Or make Curry Drop Biscuits, Sour Cream Cornsticks, Smithfield Ham Biscuits, or plain baking powder biscuits to which you have added a handful of chopped watercress when it was in the batter stage.

Other soups you may want to try follow:

SALMON SUPPER SOUP

2 tablespoons grated onion
2 tablespoons butter
1 can tomato soup.
1 can mushroom soup
1 cup flaked canned salmon
Salt and pepper

Melt the butter in a deep saucepan, add the onion and simmer two minutes. Stir in the rest of the ingredients, heat to the boiling point and serve immediately.

You'll have to consult your own taste about the additional seasonings, because some people like their soups very spicy, while others like them bland.

SWEDISH YELLOW PEA AND PORK SOUP

2 cups dried yellow peas
4 cups water

1 tablespoon salt
Dash baking soda
1 pound fresh shoulder of pork
1 2-inch piece ginger root

Soak the peas overnight. In the morning drain them, add water, baking soda and salt. Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, for one hour. Add meat and ginger. Simmer 2 hours more. Remove the ginger root. Dice the meat for garnish.

PIONEER SOUR CREAM NOODLE SOUP

1 cup navy beans
2 quarts water
1 teaspoon salt
Dash of black pepper
4 medium-sized potatoes
1 pint sour cream
1 tablespoon butter
1 tablespoon flour
1 package egg noodles parboiled in salted water

Cook the beans until tender, drain, add two quarts of water, the salt, pepper, and raw diced potatoes. Cook until the potatoes are done.

Now add the parboiled noodles and boil until the noodles come to the top of your soup pot.

In another saucepan, blend the flour with the butter until the flour is slightly browned. Add this to the soup, stirring all the while. Then add the cream, and again stir well until well mixed.

POLISH BORSCHT

Make a good strong soup base of 2 pounds of ground beef, 1 quart of water, salt and pepper, a bouquet of herbs, and a handful of soup greens.

Now put through the food chopper about 5 beets, a potato, a large onion, and 3 or 4 little green onions, if it's possible to get them. Have a plate ready to catch the vegetable juice, because you want it all for this soup.

Shred a small red cabbage, discarding the core, then sauté all these vegetables in butter, in a covered pan, until they are wilted but not completely tender. When the stock is ready, add the vegetables with a clove, a bit of blade mace, and 3 or 4 peppercorns. Cook till the vegetables are tender.

Add ¼ cup of sugar, the vegetable juice into which you have stirred 2 egg yolks, and the juice of a lemon.

If you reheat this soup, don't let it boil once you've got the eggs in it.

Here you have a sweet and sour soup which may be served thick or strained, hot or iced, with sour cream or with peppered whipped cream. It's wonderful.

CREAM OF CHICKEN AND CUCUMBER SOUP

2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons grated onion
¼ teaspoon curry powder
1 cup diced cucumber
1 can mushroom soup
1 can chicken soup
½ cup light cream
Salt and pepper

Melt the butter in a deep saucepan, stir in the curry and onion, then add the cucumber. Cover and simmer until the cucumbers are tender, which will be in about 5 minutes. Add the soups and the cream, bring to the boiling point and serve.

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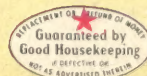
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